School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

Between Scholarship and Imagination: A Fictional Interpretation of the South African Writer and Social Theorist Olive Schreiner, 1855-1920.

Janice Leonie Caulfield

0000-0002-8041-1074

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: ……

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Abstract

Biographical fiction, archival fiction, historical fiction are all terms used to describe what novelists do when they write about real lives and events from the past. My creative production, 'A Woman of Passion', a novel about Olive Schreiner, South Africa's first white woman novelist and social thinker, required me to address questions raised about fictionalising a real life subject. My Exegesis examines debates around Historiography, Biography and Fiction. Commentators on the biographical novel mostly agree that a growing reader interest in fictional representations of the lives of real people reflects an appetite for fiction that has a guaranteed factual basis. But where does this leave the novelist? How is their work to be interpreted? Is what they do literary fiction or something else? The tension for writers of bio-fiction is between producing a novel that is trustworthy and at the same time original. My research questions address fiction's capacity for truth, and authenticity. By examining my own creative process, how I have negotiated between scholarship and imagination, I attempt to answer these questions.

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A WOMAN OF PASSION

J.L. Caulfield

Curtin University

One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious. Carl Jung

Perhaps only God knew what the lights and shadows were. Olive Schreiner

A LETTER

April, 1896

Dear Mat

Political affairs have been taking all the life out of me to such an extent that I've not been writing to anyone, and never got a chance of writing to tell you how glad I was to get your letter and book…
We have been having terrible times out here. You people in England don't know what the heel of a capitalist is when it gets right flat on the neck of a people! We have an awful struggle before us in this country.
It's no case of not being allowed to fish on somebody else's ground! You won't be allowed soon to have even a soul of our own. Now we are busy killing the poor Matabeles.

Yours hoping to see you soon, Olive

From the *Homestead, Kimberley* to Alfred Mattison, engineer, socialist and friend of Edward Carpenter.

CHAPTER ONE

March 1890

Through the window of her room she watched the breaking dawn, the distant mountains a soft and shadowy purple, the aloe plants grey stipples on the veld. For a moment she imagined she was back at Ganna Hoek, and allowed herself to dream a little. But it was Matjesfontein, and on this her first morning in the railway hamlet, she felt a pressing urge to share with Harry her euphoria at having arrived. In a flutter of excitement, she searched for her pen. She began. 'My Havelock, such a sense of wild exhilaration and freedom comes to me … this is the ideal place I have so long been longing for. I am in a shared iron house, a temporary lodging, and will be moving into my own cottage made of brick by week's end. There are no farms or homesteads here, no trees, and the water is brought from far off in iron pipes… The trains pass twice a day and it is this curious mix of civilisation and wild nature that I love.' She finished her letter at the breakfast hour, signing off with the usual declaration of fondest affection, sealed it for posting, picked up her hat, and set off for the station. In the middle of the deserted street she paused and looked about: the sun was already high in the sky, and her gaze traced across the vast plain of solemn stillness and light, of ironstone rock and red soil. No, it isn't Ganna Hoek, she said to herself, but it's the same Karroo that cuts a swathe through the heart of this land, and through my very being. She smiled at the thought.

The still silence of the morning was shattered by the sharp clanging of iron striking iron, and she saw that the gangers had already started their day's work building up the railway foundations. She felt anxious for them that they be alert and clear of the track before the train's arrival. In the station restaurant, she found tables set and a general busyness in the kitchen, and ordered an omelette and a pot of tea. In future mornings, she thought, she would arrive later and stay long enough to see the mix of faces of the travellers making their way up to the diamond fields. Her repast over and her letter to Havelock in her pocket, she went in search of the station-master who had helped her down from yesterday's train with her baggage. It seemed he had been informed of her imminent arrival in the hamlet, because he had greeted her warmly and taken great care to see that the boy with the barrow was careful in his stacking of her few possessions. Today, she noticed a change in his demeanour, not less respectful but more officious: there was no

urgency in bringing her London mail, he said, as it would not be going anywhere until six o'clock when the train stopped on its down journey to Cape Town.

She did not return to the iron house, the last in a single row of cottages and outbuildings fronting the railway line, but continued her stroll beyond, towards the kopje, the little hill, she could see in the near distance. Across the treeless veld, its polished iron stone boulders radiating light, she was reminded that it was these wide-open spaces, this motionless Karroo, this red earth and big sky that she had missed most fiercely during her years in London. She heard the train's whistle and turning her head, glimpsed a trail of grey smoke vaporising in the low scrub. Ambling towards the rocky outcrop with a powdering of red dust coating her boots and the pleasure of sunlight on her face, she tried to imagine the people on board. Bankers perhaps, certainly miners, young men dreaming their desideratum, older men who sat on boards of mining consortia, their fine clothes and polished shoes a sign of their success, and the rugged adventurers who wanted to see the fields for themselves, and bear witness to the unimagined wealth generated there.

She was keen to settle into her new house, and to her writing, and she discussed with her landlord her requirements. Mr Logan seemed a friendly fellow and she couldn't resist asking him about his soubriquet. She grinned.

'I've heard it said that you're 'the laird of Matjesfontein', Mr Logan?'

He laughed and coughed. 'I hope you will be happy in our wee village, Miss Schreiner.'

She noted a deep throttling huskiness in his voice and felt an immediate sympathy. He was a small man, but his workman like hands and sinewy forearms suggested a physical strength. In a spirit of commiseration, she shared with Mr Logan her own struggles with the condition.

'I shouldn't have fetched up here at all,' he said. 'I was on my way from Glasgow to Australia when the asthma forced me off the boat.' He croaked a laugh. 'Fate, I think they call it. Was it the asthma that brought you here, Miss Schreiner?' She said it was only part of the reason and he enquired no further. He said it was the Cape Town winters he couldn't tolerate, '… so I put my hat in the ring for the licence to operate the station refreshment rooms here in our wee village.' Logan hitched his trousers and tightened his belt. 'Between you and me, Miss Schreiner, it's been a lucrative venture that has allowed me to build these wee cottages, but with the trains stopping twice a day every day for refreshments, the demands are unremitting.'

‘Idle hands are the devil’s workshop, Mr Logan,’ she said. He flicked her a cheeky grin and offered to bring her a big desk to put in the front room.

After the tiny room in the iron house, her new abode seemed luxurious. There were three rooms in all: a bedroom with her own bed sent up from Cape Town, a sitting room with a coal grate, and a room to store her boxes and where she could take a bath. Her morning and evening meals were taken at the railway restaurant, and she took to smoking cigarettes, that her Cape Town doctor advised, was an excellent way to calm herself when an asthma attack threatened. And since moving up to the high veld, she had never felt so healthy. The clear warm air and dazzling sunlight encouraged her to exercise, and she walked each day quickening her pace to the kopje that she had seen on her first morning from her window in the iron house. She thought about her Cape Town family and their worried looks when she announced where she planned to settle. The hamlet was remote and desolate, they warned, but she didn’t feel isolated or lonely. In fact, she felt more whole surrounded by nature than she had surrounded by city buildings and people.

Her serious writing did not come immediately, rather a desire to write letters to share her newly found happiness with her English friends. She hoped, too, that her uplifting news to Havelock, and to Edward Carpenter, might reach the ears of another. In her third letter to her oldest friend, she was direct. Had he heard anything of Karl Pearson? She was less coy in the first letter she had sent to Edward from Cape Town. Her heart ached still when she thought of Karl. How he had misunderstood her so. It was weeks before Havelock’s reply came. Reading his letter brought her disappointment, for he made no mention of Pearson. She knew he resented the man’s intrusion into their relationship, his unsympathetic remarks about Pearson had told her this. She never shared with him details of her last, silent farewell to Karl before she embarked for South Africa.

Other news he sent was compensation for his silence in the matter. He said her dream allegory had been reviewed favourably in the *Review of Reviews*. The *Spectator,* too, he told her, said it was quite wonderfully written but that it lacked the power of feeling reverence. Her mother wrote, thanking her for sending a copy of her story, but blankly stated she didn’t know what the allegory was about. Her mother, she thought, could have been more charitable. Still, she felt uplifted by her latest literary achievement and she sat at Logan’s big desk to write out the prelude to her epic novel in progress. She had bold hopes for this, her second major work—the baffling success of her first would be hard to beat—but she had convinced herself this novel in creation was so much better.

She called the prelude, 'The Child's Day', and packaged it with instructions to Havelock to give it to Eleanor Marx to typewrite, 'paying her the full rate'. As she knotted the string around the loose leaves, her thoughts travelled to Alassio, the little Italian town by the sea where the idea of a prelude first came to her. She hadn't been near her manuscript for many months, where in London, at the debating club, she had been too absorbed in abstract thought and the tangle of emotion to work. But there it was, on that Riviera coast, writing itself in her mind, the life of her novel's protagonist in small. To Havelock, she said, 'It is the best thing I have ever written.'

That night, she awoke to loud claps of thunder and flashes of lightening that lit up her cottage with an eerie light of day. With child-like excitement she scrambled out of bed and rushed to the window. She lifted the sash and the night air embraced her. She breathed deeply, and the herbal scent of Karroo bush unleashed by the distant rains caught in her nostrils. From the boards under her feet, she felt tremors of thunder rolling across the veld. Lest she be struck be a lightning bolt, she stepped back from the window but the turbulent sky held her transfixed. Great arcs of fire streaked and flashed above her. In her mind's eye she saw pictures of herself with her young brother hiding under their beds, frightened by the noise yet excited by the kaleidoscope of light, and she smiled with fondness at the memory. She didn't know how long she had stayed glued to the window when she became aware of the thunder rolling away across the distant mountains and it started to rain. She closed the sash and returned to bed. At first, they were gentle drops falling on the tin roof but as the rainfall grew heavier, the hammering grew louder. She was not fearful, rather comforted by the thought that this old land and sky were welcoming her home and she snuggled into a contented sleep. The following night she wrote to Edward:

Matjesfontein
A wild place in the Karroo
Hour: 10 at night
Sky: dark: mixed stars and dark clouds.
Date 19 April, 1890

Two months had passed when she journeyed to Cape Town to revisit her brother, Will, who with his wife, Fan, had hosted her on her return to South Africa. It had been a first and somewhat uneasy meeting between the women. A South African of Dutch

descent, Fan had never been outside the Colony, while Olive had lived in London, at the heartbeat of Empire, for almost nine years. Now, she was received by them both with faces warmly welcoming. They were keen to know how she had settled in the railway hamlet, and she wanted to know about happenings in the city. She was surprised and a little disappointed that neither her brother or sister-in-law mentioned her Dream allegory, a copy of which she had enthusiastically posted to them from Matjesfontein when she received her bundle of free copies from the London publisher. Perhaps, she thought, they didn't know what the allegory was about, and were too afraid to ask. The response from her mother—an otherwise intelligent woman—and the embarrassed puzzlement of a family friend to whom she had given a copy as he passed through Matjesfontein, made her wary of mentioning it. However, before he retired for the evening, Will bent his head close to hers smothering her dark curls with a bearded kiss and squeezing her. 'Goodnight, my clever little sis,' he whispered. It was enough. She recognised her brother's need for restraint in displays of sibling admiration. She wasn't like Fan, she wasn't like Fan's friends— to them she was strange.

Fan said she would be entertaining her women friends to afternoon tea at the Mount Vernon house on the next day, and if Olive wished to join them, she would be welcomed. On her previous stay with the family, she had found these gatherings excruciating when the conversation revolved, as it invariably did, around what dresses their neighbours wore and other empty gossip. Politely, she accepted Fan's invitation. When the guests arrived the following afternoon, Olive allowed herself to be distracted by her small niece, playing hide 'n seek around the big house or settling in an arm-chair to read her stories. She loved little Dot dearly and at night, she watched as the child lay beside her awake, mouthing her own made-up stories.

The following morning, Olive sent a note to the official residence of the Cape Colony Governor, addressing the envelope to a young woman staying there, Miss Adela Villiers. Adela's reply came quickly, telling her with much excitement that she must come immediately to the Residency to meet her uncle's secretary, Mr George Seymour Fort, recently arrived from Australia. She was less interested in meeting the secretary than she was in renewing her acquaintance with Sir Henry. She had found much to admire in the new Governor and his wife whom she had met on the voyage out from London. As co-passengers with a certain celebrity, a bond of friendship had quickly established itself. Elizabeth Loch, she learnt from other of the ship's passengers, was connected to British

aristocracy, despite which Olive found the lady delightfully unassuming company and a woman of great wit. She remembered their lively conversation at the Captain's table, Sir Henry regaling them with colourful tales of his previous posting in Victoria, and Lady Loch making everyone laugh when she recounted that Sir Henry had made a grave mistake proposing marriage to herself when he really meant to ask for her twin sister's hand in marriage. She believed, said Lady Loch, that if Adela were to accompany them on this voyage to see an outreach of Empire, it would be a mind broadening experience, and she had persuaded Adela's mother to allow it. The Cape Colony, she had pressed, was much closer to home than Victoria. When they arrived in the port city, Olive offered to act as Adela's chaperone, and together the younger women had explored the settlement, cementing further their happy acquaintance.

At the Residency, Olive was sorry to find that the Governor and his wife were absent on a shopping expedition, but Adela said that if she stayed a while her aunt and uncle would soon be returned. They took tea in the conservatory.

'His name is Mr Seymour Fort and he arrived on the ship coming directly from Victoria. He is very handsome, Olive,' said Adela, blushing. 'And he's not married, though at his age, I think he should be.' Olive smiled indulgently, wishing she had been more circumspect in her earlier advice to the young woman that she should open herself to every opportunity that came her way.

'It's an exciting time for you, Adela, but you still have your life in front of you. The world is your oyster, my dear. Promise me you will not lose your heart too readily.'

As Adela listened her eyes grew earnest and her rosy complexion gave her a wistful appearance. Remembering her own passionate heart at Adela's tender age of eighteen, Olive relented.

'Does he have an interest in books?'

'Oh yes. We have been helping him unpack his boxes. He has all the English classics. He told us he writes himself, poetry, he said. Though I have asked him to show us some of his work, he has not yet produced any.'

Olive's indifference to the man shifted to curiosity. Now she was keen to meet Mr Seymour Fort and test his literary claims.

'Does he know of me and my work?' she said.

'When we told him that you were our friend, he proudly withdrew from his shelf *your* novel. I ran immediately to my room and brought him your Dream allegory to read.' Adela's enthusiasm was infectious and Olive found herself beginning to like Mr Seymour

Fort. Glancing through the lead-framed panes of the conservatory, she saw a man smartly dressed in collar and cuffs moving about between the outside rooms which she took to be offices. Adela, sitting with her back to the main house, swung her head around. She tittered.

'That's Uncle's secretary.'

'Is he going to join us, Adela?' said Olive, with an amused grin.

'He said, yes, just as soon as he has finished preparing some papers for Uncle.'

Ten minutes later, she saw Mr Seymour Fort heading towards them. She noticed his air of casual interest and good cheer. Adela offered tea and made her introductions, and in the light-hearted exchange and conversation that followed, Olive recognised a man of considerable acuity. His receding hairline, she thought, made him look older than he probably was and guessed his age at a little younger than herself, perhaps thirty.

'Adela has allowed me to read her copy of your recently published allegory, Miss Schreiner, and if I may say so, I am in awe of your skill as a writer.' Despite the hint of flattery, she felt his praise sincere.

'Thankyou, Mr. Seymour Fort, that is hugely kind of you, but did you understand its meaning?'

'Most certainly, and it moved me to respond with my own words on paper.' He hesitated, looking first to Adela, before settling his eyes on Olive. 'I hope I haven't presumed too much in this exercise, Miss Schreiner, but I've written a review. Perhaps you would like to read it?'

She had not anticipated such literary promise from a humble secretary and was left momentarily speechless and shook her head incredulously. 'Would you like to read it, Miss Schreiner? Perhaps you should. I would like to have your opinion.'

'To critique your critique, do you mean?' The words tumbled out of her mouth and she immediately regretted them, for it was a high compliment that he had paid her. He reddened. 'I shall be pleased indeed to read what you have written, Mr Seymour Fort, but first I want to know about you.' She had learnt already from Adela that he had been working for some years as Sir Henry's secretary in the Western Pacific. Seymour Fort crossed his legs and stroked at his moustache.

'What's to tell? I have been five years in Melbourne working with Governor Loch, and before that I was General Scratchley's secretary in New Guinea. Melbourne was a welcome return to civilisation after that little sojourn.'

She said, 'Victoria is a new colony, I believe?'

‘Established for almost forty years now.’

‘Like the Cape Colony then. And what of its government? Did you find the same intrigues among its political class as we have here?’ He gave a stilted laugh that suggested Mr Seymour Fort did not wish to openly share with her his thoughts on Cape politics. She considered that for a man in his position it might be thought undiplomatic to do so. Still, she remained curious to know his impressions of local political life, and said so. He gave her a compliant smile and she saw what Adela had seen: a man of extraordinary handsome appearance, firm mouth and chin, sharp nose and rather piercing grey eyes.

‘In Victoria, the Labour Party dominates, though party allegiance seemed quite lukewarm. Men of the government seemed more interested in business than in politics. To compare it with colonial politics here, it is too early for me to say.’

His cautious tone impressed her, and in the silence that followed, her eyes were drawn to a vase of Arum lilies set on the pot stand. Adela turned her head.

‘That’s my job, to do the flower arranging at Newlands. Aunt always likes to have her vases filled with fresh flowers,’ she said.

‘Beautiful’, said Olive, aware that Mr Seymour Fort was observing her.

‘Would you like to take a turn in the garden, Miss Schreiner, and you can see them in abundance,’ he said.

They strolled in the expansive gardens of the Residency, Adela falling in behind then catching up where the path allowed three abreast. The still warm air of autumn was scented with geranium, and the garden beds carpeted with white lilies and colourful gladioli. Olive leant across, lightly brushing at their petals. Fleecy clouds drifted over Table Mountain and she stopped a moment to admire its majestic presence.

‘And what do you think of our mountain, Mr Seymour Fort?’

‘It is truly a splendid feature of nature, Miss Schreiner.’ They walked on and Seymour Fort told her what he had done in England before travelling abroad. He had flirted with journalism, he said, and then an opportunity had arisen to go out to New Guinea.

She smiled mischievously at him. ‘Fancied yourself as a buccaneer, did you?’ He returned her smile but he was blushing she saw, and she shifted the conversation, again appealing to him for his impressions of the Cape Colony.

‘In Australia, they call Cape Town the “tavern in the sea”.’ He chuckled, flashing his white teeth. Mr Seymour Fort, she thought with a wry grin, had evened the score.

That evening, in the privacy of her bedroom at her brother's house, she read Seymour Fort's critique of her allegory. The man had understood her story in full and this warmed her heart. And as she read his characterisation of her as a writer, she held her breath; 'no placid artist', he had written, 'who employed her literary skill for merely aesthetic purposes', but that she wrote in the cause of the oppressed, 'her pen wielded more deadly than a sword in attacking the capitalist oppressors'. Lionised abroad and in South Africa for her first novel, she had met no one since her return to the Colony that had shown the slightest interest in her new work. She clutched the paper to her chest, and her eyes watered up. Her first thought was to invite Seymour Fort to visit her at Matjesfontein, though she had become aware that, after money, the currency of Cape Town society was gossip, and her friendship with Adela and the Lochs was too important to put at risk. Instead, she wrote him a letter. She agreed whole-heartedly, she said, of everything he had written about her story and wished him success in finding a publisher for his review. His reply came swiftly. He had sent his review to Australia, to the editor of a new literary journal in that country called *The Bulletin.* She was encouraged by this news and she resolved to continue her correspondence with Mr Seymour Fort.

CHAPTER TWO

April 1890

Settling into her chair positioned at the big desk that Logan had provided, she thought deeply about her writing. The allegorical style that had become her metier, she knew, was not to everyone's liking. It was in Alassio where she had travelled from London to seek relief from her asthmatic chest, that she fully developed the style. She always found wellness in this little town by the sea with its warm sun, clean air and fresh food. When first she visited, escaping an English winter, the sensuality of heat and landscape was like being awakened from a long sleep. It was during her last visit there—when in London she had reached her lowest point of anguish and despair—that the little town on the Riviera had saved her and made her well again. She had taken up the challenge of a new invention, a bicycle. Unsteady at first, she eventually grasped the technique after which she made a point of leaving the hotel each morning before the sun was high and hot, to ride to the farthest point of land jutting out to the sea. A small chapel in a state of disrepair and no longer used for worship, stood on the rocky outcrop. She pedalled along the limestone path passing by white houses and the dipping shadows of lofty pines, the scent strong in her nostrils and the salt air fanning her cheeks. She passed the fishermen hauling in their nets, and on she rode, bumping along the path, looking straight ahead to the little chapel standing alone on the promontory as if adrift in the calm sea waters.

She lay her bicycle down on a tuft of grass and climbed the limestone steps. The chapel door, its paint blistered from the Mediterranean sun, stood ajar. She entered the cool dark space now cleared of its adornments. One relic remained, a guardian, a protector of this once holy place. Suspended from the water-stained ceiling was a crucifix, Christ on the Cross. Fleetingly, she thought of her father who had died many years before, and then she thought of her sister, Alice, who passed unnaturally from this world a year ago. The sisters' relationship had never been an intimate one, but the news from her mother came as a shock. Alice's heart had given out. How many children had she birthed? Olive remembered the letters that arrived in England at regular intervals, from her mother or from her sister, Ettie, announcing the birth, or death, of another new baby. She recalled the last of these letter pairs—they always seemed to come in twos—one announcing the newest arrival, a chubby and strong little fellow. Alice was overjoyed, they said. And then came the grim news of the child's premature death. Olive rested in the sunlit porch of the

ruin and gazed upon the blue sea and across the bay to the red and white houses that seemed to hang suspended from the mountainside. She heard the wind whistling in the trees and the waves lapping at the rocks below. She returned to the hotel on foot, pushing her bicycle, following a peasant boy and his ass that carried two large panniers. She would have liked to speak to the boy, but she had progressed little with the language, even after several attempts to read the Boccaccio stories that Havelock had given her.

Feeling physically invigorated and mentally restored, she returned her bicycle to the hotel boat shed and relaxed on a deck chair and the waiter brought her a glass of lemon water. A fellow guest at the hotel, a tall Nordic looking man who had watched her go, asked her how she found riding the new contraption. She said she felt rested and believed it was the movement of the legs that made it so. She sat quietly sipping her cool drink, basking in the soft light of spring, thinking about the beauty of this little corner of heaven on earth, reflecting on what had happened to her in London that left her with a sore and angry heart. She realised how beautiful and bountiful were God's gifts, and that she had no need of anger. At her small table in her hotel room, an allegory story had flowed easily from her pen. Her discovery at perfecting the technique was exhilarating. It was not the first allegory she had written, but this story was different, complete in itself. It was a breakthrough. 'In a Ruined Chapel' now formed part of her collected stories of dream allegories that Unwin promised would be published by year's end.

Logan called by the cottage to ask Olive something, he said, that had been on his mind since her arrival in the hamlet.

'Miss Schreiner, I would be honoured if you would allow me to name the house here, *Schreiner Cottage*.' She had not expected this and was deeply touched. She howled her delight.

'Mr Logan, nothing would make me happier than to have my stamp placed upon this little house that has given me the most wonderful sense of peace and tranquillity.' A broad grin lighted Mr Logan's sun bronzed face.

'Right then, I thought the gate pillars is where we'll paint your name. And another thing, Miss Schreiner, everyone round these parts calls me Jimmy, I hope you will too.'

'Then you must call me Olive!' They both laughed.

In the event, it proved a useful addition as none of the cottages had names or numbers placed upon them, and those of her friends and family who lived either in Cape Town or

further afield, and visited her in the coming months, had no trouble in locating the cottage. Her first visitor was a young native woman who came to Schreiner Cottage looking for work. Olive was expecting her for she had earlier enquired of the waitress in the dining room if she knew of a woman who could clean her house and wash her clothes. The waitress didn't hesitate. Her sister would do it. She promised Olive that Beyonce was a clean, religious woman and trustworthy. When Olive opened the door to her servant, she noticed a small child lingering by the gate.

'It's my daughter,' said Beyonce, 'but she's alright, she will wait until I have finished work.'

Olive wouldn't hear of it and invited the girl to come in with her mother. The child, who could not have been more than six years old, looked from one to the other of the women, unsure of what was expected. Olive motioned to her to come, and the child walked shyly towards the stoep.

'This is Aya,' said Beyonce. 'She prefers to sit outside in the sunshine.' Olive noticed the child's skin was a lighter colour than that of her mother's. She took the little girl's hand and offered to bring her pencils and paper so that she could draw some pictures while waiting for her mother.

Beyonce only came to the house once a week, always with her small daughter, who always waited outside. Olive found children's books for Aya to look at on her visits to Miss Schreiner's house. When Beyonce finished her duties in the house and said, 'I'll be going now, Miss Schreiner'. Olive rose from her desk to open the door for her servant woman. To their surprise, Aya was not on the stoep where they had left her, only the discarded books. They found the little girl at the side of the house, sleeping under one of the eucalyptus tree saplings that Mr Logan had planted there. Olive motioned to Beyonce not to wake her child too suddenly, wondering what sweet dreams the child might be having, and so they stood together looking on at the picture of sleeping innocence that was little Aya.

The child brought to Olive's mind a story she wrote when first she arrived in London and moved in with her eldest brother. Fred taught at New College in Eastbourne, and she had written the story for his college magazine. The girl in her story was called Janita, and she had set it in South Africa on a Boer farm where the little coloured girl minded sheep. It had always been a favourite of Olive's. Now, it occurred to her the story could be included in a second collection of short stories she had promised her publisher, and she went into the storeroom to search for it. She looked hesitantly at the battered trunk

sent out from England. She hadn't wanted to go there, to dig into her papers, caches of old letters, diaries, exercise books and memorabilia stuffed inside, knowing if she were to do so it would be an irresistible distraction. But it was not the only reason she had avoided opening it since its arrival in Matjesfontein. Her trunk held the memories of a life lived, an exciting life but one that after almost nine intense years, had left her drained of energy and will. She thought she could probably grasp that life again, handle things differently, should she return to England. On this prospect, she remained undecided, though it was never far from her mind.

Both the men in her London life, her English men as she liked to think of them, had since her departure found other companions and it was only a matter of time, she knew, before they would be married. Havelock's letters told her this, not because of what he said, but what he didn't say. There was nothing personal in them. It didn't sound like Harry. He was going to Paris, he said. Only later did he tell her why. He had gone with his new friend, Edith Lees. Karl Pearson remained steadfastly silent, not even responding to Olive's letters, though she had written to him twice. In her solitude she thought of him often, needing to let go but her heart and head refusing to do so. Lest he should read between the lines of her letters her emotional grief at the ending of their friendship, she comforted herself with the thought it wouldn't end if she refused to allow it. She would write again, brightly, about her new life in South Africa and the promise it held for her writing. Why had he not replied? Perhaps, she conceded, in her eagerness to retain her dignity, she had said he need not.

How she had struggled in that last year in London, to rise above feelings of sexual love for the man who provided her intellectual nourishment. Her mind flipped to Donkin, her London doctor and friend who had attended on her at her lowest. Hah, the Men and Women's Club—their debating society. She had introduced her friend to the Club. Donkin presented a paper, linking female hysteria to suppressed sexuality. He had come to her house, caught her in a moment of her deep despair, took it upon himself to write to Karl Pearson. Sweet man that Donkin was, his action angered her. He should not have interfered, she told him, in matters of the heart. He had ventured beyond the ethics of his profession. Her distress at the intervention spilled over into another scrawled letter to Pearson from her London sick bed. It was then that she realised she had reached a point of no return, the only escape from which was to flee. She travelled first to Switzerland and then to Italy. From Alassio, her sanity restored by distance, she had requested Unwin post to her Pearson's most recent publication, *Ethic of Freethought*. Once read, she felt

compelled to share with him, 'as one free thinker to another,' she said, her thoughts on his latest work. She had written a favourable review of his book for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, she told him. That letter, she now recalled, she had finished in the same manner. 'You need not reply'.

Returning to England from the Continent, she studiously avoided the Men and Women's Club though other of its members tried to entice her back. She went instead to London's East End to be close to the Dock Strike, and she attended Hyde Park to hear Eleanor Marx address a crowd of one hundred thousand working men on their right to unionise. It was after that gathering that she made her way, alone, to University College and stood in the rain, taking shelter in a doorway, waiting for Karl to leave his office. She had gone there wanting to see him one last time before she sailed for her homeland. She waited until her dripping wet clothes and the spreading darkness began to attract attention from passers-by. His failure to appear painfully confirmed for her the futility of a one-sided love. Still, Pearson lived with her day after day. Images came and went, the intensity of his blue eyes, his ironic smile. She lifted the lid of her trunk and found her magazine story.

A less confronting repository than her trunk of memorabilia was her small, carved wooden box where once she kept mementos. Now, it kept letters received from across the ocean, and from old South African friends who were delighted to have her returned to the country and communicated their wish to see her. Among the recent correspondence was a curious letter received from a man she did not know. The letter came addressed to her at Matjesfontein. In another letter that arrived shortly thereafter from Erilda Carwood, her old friend from Ganna Hoek, Olive learned that this man was Mrs Carwood's neighbour. She read both letters again. Erilda's mention of the fact gave her no further clue. If he is a neighbour, it is likely he is a farmer, she reasoned, and yet his letter suggested otherwise. SC Cronwright was clearly an educated man who appreciated literature, she thought him possibly a journalist. Cronwright's letter, in its praise of her famous novel, reminded her of the very first letter she received from a 'Dr Havelock Ellis' years ago, shortly after the novel's publication. *The Story of an African Farm* was brilliant, he had said, and reminded him of his time in 'up country' New South Wales. Harry was a stranger to her then, but in the thrill of the moment—a first letter from an appreciative reader—she had responded eagerly. She would not respond to Mr Cronwright until she had at least interrogated Erilda Carwood.

The days grew short and the swallows flew north and she began to feel anxious that she would not survive the cold. In England, it was always the winter months that most affected her chest, but she reminded herself that Matjesfontein was high country and though it would likely turn frostily bitter at night, the days for the most part would remain sunny and dry. It was a glorious afternoon and the thrashing wind of the previous night had fallen away when she walked out on a veld flushed green from an autumn sprinkling, taking John Ruskin's book on architecture with her. She had been working at her own book, her next great novel, for most of the day. 'From Man to Man', she repeated it like a mantra as she walked. How many times, she wondered, had she changed the title of this work in progress in the fourteen years since the story's genesis? She was pleased with the title she had settled on, but still there was a nagging doubt in her mind about the work. In her heart, she knew her story was true, but how many people would understand it? Reaching the kopje, she sat down on some iron stone boulders at its foot and balancing Ruskin on her knees spread the single sheet of lined paper torn from one of her exercise books before her. She didn't know what happened next but suddenly she was bawling, gripped by a sense of utter despair and defeat. She had no idea why such grief had come to her. A whistle of breeze crept past the kopje stones and brushed at her cheek. She calmed herself, looked upwards to the sky and out across a plain alive with the pink and orange of the setting sun. As a lover of nature and colour, Ruskin would surely be bedazzled.

At the end of June, she journeyed again to Cape Town to see Will and his family. She hoped, too, to meet with Mr Seymour Fort. They had kept up their correspondence, sharing ideas of literature and journalism, and Olive felt a growing sense of comradeship with the man. When she arrived in the gusty capital, the Legislative Assembly was in session, and she told Will that she wanted to go there, to sit in the public gallery and listen to the debates. 'If the weather holds, I'll drive you in the trap on my way to chambers tomorrow, otherwise we'll take a cape cart,' he said. She smiled gently at him and said that would suit her perfectly, she had brought her English coat, hat and gloves, and would enjoy a ride in the open air.

Her affection for her brother ran deep. He was younger than her by three years, and though he had received a privileged education where she had received no formal schooling, her pride in Will's achievements she held without resentment. They had been together briefly in England when first she arrived in the home country, settling in Eastbourne with Fred. Will was sitting his final law exams at Cambridge. Her two

brothers persuaded her that before she attempted a vocation in medicine, she should find a publisher for her book, 'that portentous thing you carry around,' said Will. She felt at the time that they didn't trust her mathematical abilities, essential if she was to pursue her long held passion for a science degree. Here with Will now, she was reminded of the strange twist her life had taken by following her brothers' advice. It was hardly surprising, she thought, that her failure to consummate her passion for science during those years, led to her meeting a mathematics professor. She wondered if that was why she loved Karl Pearson so. Possibly, he was the nearest she felt she would come to reaching her own forsaken dream. She went out onto the veranda of the Mount Vernon house and sat at the garden table. She scribbled a brief note to Adela inviting her to join her for lunch the next day. She proposed that they meet in the Botanical Gardens at one o'clock. If Adela wished it, she wrote, she could extend the invitation to Mr Seymour Fort.

Olive was not alone in the public gallery, for the Parliamentary sessions carried something of a festive atmosphere attracting many Capetonians. She found a seat in the front row where she was able to look directly down through the polished wood railing to the pit below. On one side of the chamber was a large wall clock and on the other, a gilt framed portrait of the Monarch. Her attention was steadfastly held for two hours of debate between the man she knew to be Mr Cecil Rhodes and Premier Sprigg. The first thing she noticed about Rhodes was his large frame and unconventional dress. Where most of the parliamentarians were formally attired in fine sable clothing, Mr Rhodes' tweed jacket and baggy trousers, together with a restless movement of the body, gave him a shambled appearance. And as he looked heavenwards, she noticed the colour of his eyes. They were ice blue. From her place in the gallery above the chamber, she listened as the men debated the construction of a railway beyond the diamond fields at Kimberley. An extension of the line from Kimberley to the north was being advocated by Mr Rhodes, his falsetto voice coming in bursts of apparent frustration with Premier Sprigg who was arguing just as forcefully that the Parliament's first priority must be the construction of branch lines in the Midlands, that the Eastern Provence's rural economy depended on it.

The debate continued and she left the gallery, making her way down the bannistered wooden stairs. Entering the Gardens, she saw Adela standing with Mr. Seymour Fort. She was twirling her parasol and engaged, in what Olive imagined, was some frivolous gossip as they were both giggling. Adela spotted her first and Seymour

Fort, who was in mid-sentence, turned his head sharply. He reddened and she wondered what gossip she may have interrupted.

Adela said, 'Olive, it's so nice to see you. Please excuse us but we were just having a laugh at Uncle's expense. The dear man has this curious habit of blowing his nose before receiving his guests, rather like a trumpet call.' In Seymour Fort's abashed smile, Olive sensed his embarrassment.

'Hello, Miss Schreiner, it's good to see you again,' he said. She kissed Adela and turned to him.

'I'm very glad you could make our lunch today, Mr Seymour Fort.'

'Adela tells me you have been listening to the Parliamentary debates this morning. Any intrigues that I could pass onto Sir Henry?' he said jocularly.

'No doubt the Governor will receive copy of the record in due course, but what I can tell you is that Mr Rhodes wants to extend the train line north from Kimberley. It seems he has received from the Home Office in London a land concession in Bechuanaland for the purpose. Do you know Mr. Rhodes, Mr Fort?'

'Yes, we've met a couple of times when he has attended on His Excellency. I must confess, I don't find him an easy person to warm to. What is your impression of the man, Miss Schreiner?'

'He has an unusual personality no doubt, but in my opinion, he may be the one great thing South Africa has to offer.'

'Because he likes to build railways?'

'Because he has power and influence, Mr Fort. By which I mean influence in Westminster. Now, let us find a table in the Gardens restaurant and we can continue with Cape politics or literature or both.'

They took their seats at a table in the courtyard where no other diners sat. A high wall giving shelter from the breeze radiated heat and they chose the closest table to it. The warming winter sun suspended in a cloudless sky caused Olive to sigh. 'It's what I love most about this country,' she said. Her companions agreed it was the perfect place to be on this day in this pleasant interlude in what had been a cold and blustery start to the season. Their orders placed, Seymour Fort turned to Olive.

'Your brother is an admirable man, Miss Schreiner. We see him quite a lot at Government House. His job as parliamentary draughtsman requires him to give legal advice to Sir Henry, but of course, you would know this.'

‘Yes. Will has a brilliant legal mind and he is a truly noble man. Have you met the children?’

‘Indeed, I have. I have even given them pony rides over the kloof when Mr Schreiner and His Excellency had matters to discuss.’ Seymour Fort proceeded to tell the women about his temperamental three-quarter bred pony, who always took good care of the children, but did not like the groom and how the groom had bellowed for help when the mare went for him with open maw. Listening attentively, her face bright with excitement, Adela rubbed her hands with glee and bounced on her seat, drawing the mirth of her companions. Over the course of their lunch, Olive realized that Adela had very little interest in the machinations of government; her main preoccupation seemed to be with Seymour Fort. She hung on his every word, laughing and smiling at most anything he said. Olive asked if he had heard back from Australia about his review of her allegory. He had not, he said, but then mail between the two countries was slow, and he hoped to hear still. ‘Perhaps I could get it published locally?’

‘Why don’t you try the *Cape Times*? If they’re not willing to publish it, send it to the *Argus*,’ she said.

They finished their meal, and begging their pardon, Seymour Fort announced that he must return to his office. Adela was quickly on her feet.

‘I’ll come with you, Mr Seymour Fort.’ She leant across the table holding out her gloved hand. ‘Olive, this has been such a pleasure. Do let us meet again, the three of us, when next you are in town.’ Olive didn’t attempt to stand but she shook hands with Seymour Fort, and Adela came around to her side and kissed her farewell. Olive sat a moment longer in the sun-trap feeling a great fondness for her new friends as she watched them bustling away down the path. She resolved that on her next visit to Cape Town she would invite Seymour Fort to attend on her alone. She loved Adela dearly, and would arrange for the two of them to meet separately. It was important, she felt, for the young woman to feel free to speak frankly about her hopes and fears uninhibited by the distractions of a man, and equally so for him, to feel less pressured to be amusing.

The following day, she received a letter from Seymour Fort sent to her at her brother’s house. She thought perhaps it carried an apology for his casual play of talk in Adela’s presence. Had he realised that she expected more from him? His letter, however, conveyed something altogether unexpected.

'Miss, Schreiner, I am writing to let you know in advance of you reading it in the papers, that Premier Sprigg has resigned his commission. I know this will be of much interest to you. His Excellency sent me to ask Mr Sauer, who you know is deputy premier, to come to him. I had just reached the top of the steps of the Parliament building where Sauer's office is located, when Rhodes appeared. He asked if I was looking for him. I had to say 'No, I am looking for Sauer.' His face blackened and with an angry twist of his body, he turned and marched away.'

It was early evening when Will returned to the Mount Vernon house and was able to confirm to his family that the Premier of the Cape government had indeed resigned his position. What did it mean? Olive wanted to know. Fan was equally curious but the dinner preparations required her attention, and she left them. Will removed his coat and loosened his tie. The children came in, Dot wanting to be picked up by her father, and Billy, content to sit quietly on the couch with his aunt.

'Old Sprigg is not popular with the other members. Like an oyster on a rock, he has clung to office too long,' said Will. She wondered if it had been the contest over railways that she had witnessed just yesterday, that had morphed into a full-scale war between the protagonists.

'Who do you think will replace him?' she asked.

'Could be Sauer, could be Rhodes,' said Will. He put Dot down so that she too could take up a position on the couch, next to her aunt. Olive embraced the children, hugging them into her and tickling them so that they giggled naughtily. She noticed Will was pensive, not including himself in the little scene of family affection taking place on the couch. He was turned against her, looking into the log fire that glowed and crackled gently. She calmed the children down, and looked earnestly at her brother.

'What do *you* think of Mr Rhodes, Will?' He held the palms of his hands to the fire and considered her question.

'I think to have as leader of our government, a man of his greatness, wealth and influence, would be the best choice for the Colony's advancement,' he said.

'That's a sentiment shared by my journalist friend,' she said.

'Oh, who is that?'

'William Thomas Stead.' Will looked blank.

'In England.' Olive had recently received a letter from WT Stead who wished to share with her his recent pleasure in meeting Mr. Rhodes in London. He had told her he had the deepest sympathy for the man's vision, not only for South Africa but for the

Empire. As chairman of the De Beers Diamond Mines and managing director of the British South African Chartered Company, she thought Mr Rhodes must certainly be its richest. She thought too, him possibly the only man of genius—with the exception of her brother—South Africa possessed. Yet, if he were to seize power, she felt it would be an unsettling development. She was reminded of a passage from the Book of Matthew she had heard, as a child, her father repeat in penitence and self-admonishment. 'One cannot serve mammon and God at the same time.' Caught moonlighting, her father had been cruelly stripped of his livelihood and vocation by the London Missionary Society in Africa. Poor Papa, she thought, how can it be a sin that a man seeks to extend his meagre wage to help his family? Her memories of family life and love threw her into a moment of melancholy sadness.

'Do you ever think of Papa, Will?'

In Matjesfontein, Olive received a letter from her brother asking if she would like to meet Mr Rhodes who would shortly be passing through the hamlet on his way to Kimberley. He had been conversing with him, explained Will, and Rhodes had said he would very much like to meet his sister, the esteemed author. She was delighted that the great man should wish to meet with her, and she replied immediately, confirming her willingness to do so. She was keen to meet the man of whom she had heard and read much.

On the nominated day, her visitor arrived at ten o'clock on the up-train from Cape Town. In a sea of unfamiliar faces stepping down, she recognised him immediately. Somehow though, away from the parliamentary gaggle, she thought he looked different. He carried about his person the same aura that she had found deeply affecting when she had first laid eyes on Mr Rhodes. It was when she was seeing her sister, Ettie, off from Southampton not long before she herself sailed. With his close curly hair, and the same curious far-off look as her character Waldo in *An African Farm*, and his huge, almost gross body, he stood out from the crowd. She put out her hand to welcome him in the manner of one of his male colleagues, which he appeared to enjoy and they moved into the railway restaurant.

A general bustle of movement and light-hearted exchanges followed them as other passengers found tables. Some of Rhodes' fellow travellers were known to him while others, smiling and nodding as they passed, simply wanted to extend their greetings to the great man. She felt the glamour surrounding him and a swelling of her own importance at being the one he had chosen to breakfast with. Rhodes unbuttoned his close-fitting jacket,

and they placed their orders. She was tempted to say that she had seen him just weeks ago in the parliamentary pit, debating the railway line extension, but drew back. Then, briefly, she considered saying that she had seen him months ago, at Southampton dock. Instead, she said, 'Do you travel home often, Mr. Rhodes?'

'Three or four times a year. And you, Miss Schreiner, do you miss London?'

'Not in the least. I miss my English friends and would like them to visit me here in South Africa, but miss London? Never.' A complacent smile crossed his face. He asked her why she had chosen to settle in Matjesfontein. She loved the veld, she said, but more than this, it was the hermit's life, so necessary for her to be in touch with her creative self. She told him about her book of dream allegories, shortly to be published. He nodded appreciatively, and politely asked if she would send him a copy when it became available. She held up hands with fingers crossed. 'By the end of the year, Mr Rhodes, I hope. Presently, I am working on a second collection of stories… from real life.'

'Your life?' he asked her.

'Some, and some purely imagined.' She wanted to move the focus off herself, she wanted to talk politics. Olive had learned that her best asset were her large dark eyes that seemed able to hold a person in a sort of embrace with her. She fixed her eyes on him.

'I hear talk you are considering taking on the prime ministership of the Colony, Mr Rhodes.'

He expressed surprise. 'You should know to take no notice of rumours, Miss Schreiner.'

'I'm glad to hear it is only rumour, Mr Rhodes, because I think it would be a grave mistake. One cannot play the hand of the Colony and at the same time play the hand of the Chartered Company.'

Rhodes was stunned to silence by her forthrightness and turned his face to nearby tables, delivering implicit greetings to others. She saw his discomfort at hearing what she felt she must say, but she did not for a moment consider she may have breached decorum in saying it. Olive had returned to her native South Africa with a strong sense of authority on matters political and social, and with an unbridled confidence in the correctness of her views. In London, she had moved in circles with England's brightest—writers, thinkers and politicians among them. Once the shy young lady departed these shores, now returned a wisely woman, she felt she had earned the right to speak her mind. More than this, she wanted to share the knowledge she had gained living in a broader atmosphere where matters of the day were openly debated. She saw herself as an enabler, and wanted to help

her countrymen see the true path to greatness, for all South Africans. Now, as she watched him shifting on his seat, restless for his breakfast to arrive, her only concern was that she may have overplayed her hand.

Rhodes was looking over his shoulder towards the kitchen. His eyes averted, she watched him; his face, fleshy pink and jowly, was clean-shaven save a bushy yet neatly clipped moustache that revealed only a thick bottom lip. It suggested to her a masterful mouth. And those piercing blue eyes behind which, she thought, lay many secrets that may with the passage of time be revealed to her. Despite his physical size and inestimable wealth, Olive thought him somehow child-like, and felt herself being drawn to this side of his nature.

With their breakfast served, Rhodes turned his attention back to Olive. 'It might interest you to know, Miss Schreiner, that I keep your famous novel by my bedside.'

'What do you like about it, Mr Rhodes?'

'Its freshness.'

'I was a child when I wrote it.'

'Perhaps that is what I like about it.' His eyes lit up, and seeing the irony, she gave him a wry smile.

'When my short stories are published, it is my intention to travel to the interior, to Matabeleland and Mashonaland.' It was her reason for coming back to Africa, to see the country in the north, she said. 'When I was a little girl, these lands were said to be fabulously rich. We believed it was where the Queen of Sheba brought peacocks and gold for King Solomon.' Rhodes eyes widened.

'No need to wait until your book is published, Miss Schreiner, if you would like to go, I'll send you with two ox wagons, at my expense.' His offer, unexpected, rendered her speechless. It had been her secret hope that a man such as he would sponsor her journey, but now she sensed a trap. Regaining her composure, she said,

'I thank you, Mr. Rhodes; it is a generous offer but if I travel there, I should prefer to do so by my own means.' Olive had intuited that should she gather disturbing information from these lands, her ability to report the truth would be compromised by being a guest of a Cape Parliamentarian. Yet she remained unsure if her rejection of Rhodes' offer was guided by fine principle or a fear that should she accept his money, she would appear to him weak. When it was time for Rhodes to reboard the train, she again extended her hand in friendship.

He said, ‘It’s the first time we have met, Miss Schreiner. I am sure it will not be the last.’

CHAPTER THREE

August 1890

The Kimberley-bound train chugged out of the station leaving in its wake a sulphurous air and she walked hurriedly to the station-master's office. It was the day of the week when mail from England was most likely to arrive. Mr van Wyk emptied the contents of a large canvas bag onto his desk, and she watched his arthritic fingers sort through bundles of letters. He picked out an oversized envelope post-marked 'London'. 'This one could be for you, Miss Schreiner.' It was the April edition of the *Review of Reviews*, the first she had received in South Africa. WT Stead, the journal's editor, had included with the journal a personal letter congratulating her on publication of her allegory, *Sunlight Lay*, and drawing her attention to his favourable critique of the story, published in the edition she now held in her hands.

In the quiet of her cottage a warm glow enveloped her as she read Stead's sympathetic review. Old Stead, as she liked to think of her journalist friend, though he was barely much older than herself, had embraced the new journalism of investigative reporting: a perilous vocation he soon discovered when, after researching and publishing an expose on child prostitution in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he found himself a prisoner of Her Majesty's government for alleged 'procurement'. In his article, 'The Maiden Tribute', Stead had revealed the hypocrisy of Victorian England that idealised the innocence and purity of childhood while its respectable citizens trawled the slums of London seeking out virgins as young as twelve for clean sexual pleasure. With her friends at the Men and Women's Club, equally outraged by the criminal conviction against the journalist and whistle blower, Olive wrote letters to the papers in his defence. Dismissed from his post at the *Gazette,* Stead had established his own sixpenny periodical. As far as she now was from the metropolitan centre of art and literature, feeling at times a sense of desperation at having so dramatically removed herself from its heartbeat, she was cheered by this literary development.

Her thoughts rested a while on Stead, how supportive the man had been in recognising her talent and now, with his own monthly, how valuable he could still be. She would write to him at once, to give him news of South Africa, of the important acquaintances she had made, men who had become her friends such as Lord Loch, and among whom she now felt she could count the biggest of them all, Mr Cecil Rhodes. That

evening, she wrote another letter, this time to Havelock. She attempted to explain to him the intensity of feeling her meeting with Mr Rhodes had engendered. He was like a kindred spirit, she said, and she had experienced a queer sensation that he belonged to her. Before retiring, she wrote in her journal, *Mr Rhodes spoke to me more lovingly and sympathetically of 'An African Farm' than anyone has ever done.*

She settled back happily into her writing knowing that should her collection of short stories be a publication success, Unwin would be looking to her for more. She felt herself at a new beginning of literary output. She tried to contain her enthusiasm and stay focussed, but her mind wandered. She thought about money, she thought about travel and where she might go when she had accumulated enough of it. Her meeting with Rhodes had added a new dimension to her life and she was hopeful of good things to come. It was some days after he had passed through the hamlet, when returning to her cottage after breakfast, her rolled and unopened copy of *The Cape Times* under her arm, she bumped into Mrs Logan. 'Beyonce's little girl has taken ill,' she said. 'I've been to see the child, she is covered in a rash, I suspect measles.'

'Has the child been isolated from the other children?' asked Olive.

'I've instructed Beyonce to bring Aya across to the iron house where we have set up a bed for her in the gardening shed.' She praised Mrs Logan for her quick action and offered help should it be needed. The nearest doctor was forty miles away, at the next railway town, and he could be summoned if necessary.

Opening the cottage door, Olive began scratching at the skin on her forearms. It was nonsense, she told herself, Beyonce had not been back to the cottage since her return from Cape Town, and she hadn't even seen the mother and daughter who, she had been told, were away visiting relatives. Pushing it out of her mind she unrolled her newspaper and folded out the broadsheet. On its front page was an image of Mr Rhodes, and in celebratory tone, the headline announced his appointment to the Premiership. She let out an agonised gasp as though she had received a blow to the stomach. Her eyes raced through the text. She began to pace up and down shaking her head and punching her right fist into her left hand. He had not heeded her advice. An initial feeling of hurt and rejection was soon replaced by an overwhelming sadness, and sense of foreboding. It was not just for the Colony that she felt afraid; it was for the man himself. She was convinced that accepting the Premiership could only lead Rhodes to harm. Despite Will's ambivalence on the matter of Premier Sprigg's replacement, she had desperately hoped

that Mr Sauer would accept Lord Loch's offer to lead the government. Her stomach churned and she continued her march up and down her small room, punching into her hand as her mind raced. She lit a cigarette then sat at her desk and dashed off a note to Seymour Fort.

That evening, returning from the railway restaurant, Olive felt a tightening in her chest, causing her to slow her pace. By the time she reached her front door she was breathing with difficulty. It was an asthmatic symptom she knew well. Distressed that the wretched ailment that had plagued her throughout her adult life had returned, she went directly to her medical box and withdrew a small bottle of quinine infused snuff. She snorted hard. The action induced a powerful bout of coughing that made her go weak at the knees and she slumped in her armchair. Soon, she was wheezing heavily, interrupted by spasms of coughing so powerful they shook her whole body and made her head hurt. Pulling her shawl around her, she tried to calm herself, taking short and frequent gulps of air. To panic would only worsen her condition, she knew. She searched in her medical box and found the phial of morphia that Havelock had sent her after a life-threatening attack she had suffered while visiting her mother. She disliked morphia, or at least the after-effects, but it was the only remedy that worked at relaxing the muscular contractions. She rolled the sleeve of her arm, pumped up a vein and pushed in the needle. Her chest quietened and she breathed more freely, and was soon drowsy enough to crawl into her bed.

The measles case in Matjesfontein had been contained. Aya was on the road to recovery. This happy news was conveyed to Olive by Aya's mother who she met coming out of the iron house. Beyonce said Aya had no sign of a rash now and wanted to return home. Olive stood a little distance back as she listened to Beyonce recall a measles outbreak in her village when she herself was a child. Many had died from the disease, said Beyonce. She thanked the good Lord then for sparing her, and had gone down on her hands and knees again that He had spared Aya. Olive said that when Aya was fully recovered, Beyonce might want to resume her duties at Schreiner Cottage. She thought that if she could settle into a routine without distractions of domestic or political matters, she might be able to progress her writing. Encouraging words had come from Unwin for a second collection of stories. She resolved to put colonial politics out of her mind, become an island, and eschew all communication. But a new anxiety arose.

Her *Dreams* book, a collection of allegorical stories shortly to be released to the world, kept her in a state of worry about how readers—and critics—would receive it. Would her readers fail to understand the meaning of her stories as her mother and John Pursglove had misunderstood *Sunlight Lay*? She had handed the family friend a copy when he passed through Matjesfontein. He had thanked her, asked her what was an allegory and said he would read it on the train to Kimberley. Sitting with him in the railway restaurant on his return journey next day, she had found herself coaxing him to say what he thought her story was about. With an uncomfortable reddening, he said he thought it was about drinking. She had swallowed a disdainful laugh and redirected the conversation to a place in which she knew he would feel more comfortable.

'Do you remember, John, our time on the diamond fields when Kimberly was called New Rush?'

'You were young, Olive, just seventeen I remember.'

'We were *all* young.'

Through his greying walrus moustache, she caught his rueful smile.

'You wouldn't know the place,' he said, 'Kimberly is now a town of industrial orderliness, though not much has changed in the balance of the sexes, women still few, far outnumbered by men, must be quite lonely for them.'

Her mind had flashed to the scientific book she would have liked to write with Karl Pearson who, like herself, was strongly drawn to the problem of the sexes, how to explain the phenomenon of sex difference, and how to understand relations between men and women. For Pearson, it was a scientific pursuit, for her it was an intellectual search for the ideal in relations between the sexes. At their Club, Pearson had coined it, 'The Woman Question'.

Sitting at her desk with her ink pot replenished and her pen lying neatly beside her exercise book, she thought again of that meeting with John Pursglove, their reminiscing about New Rush where, in her youth, she had spent several months living with her elder brother, Theo, her sister, Ettie, and Pursglove. She pondered on the unnatural environment of a mining town where women were few in number. The problem of the sexes, as she saw it now, the social inequality between men and women, was never far from her mind. She had always wanted to write a sex book—a scientific study—that would be at least equal to and better than those written with seeming ease by her male peers. Not since Mary

Wollstonecraft had a single serious study of the matter of the sexes been produced by a woman.

She stood suddenly as though a flash of summer light had entered the cottage and went quickly to the store-room and retrieved her small wooden box. It was a box that was very dear to her, given as a gift by her parents when she secured her first job as governess and was able to leave the care of her older brother and sister and find for the first time, financial independence. She lifted the lid on its tiny rusting hinges and gently removed the Karroo rose that she had picked from the carpeted veld and pressed between folded India paper. It was her intention to include the rose in one of her letters to Havelock. Unfolding the paper, she was reminded of those days at New Rush, and a young woman's gift.

She had left her parents' home at Hertzog and travelled for six days, three by a Cobb & Co coach, changing at Bloemfontein to Ella's ox-drawn passenger wagon. The travellers met with an unexpected delay at the Orange River that had swollen into a torrent following flooding rains. She was glad of the company of the only other woman in the travelling party because they were required to over-night there: the young women in a mud-brick cottage, the men under canvas in the wagon. Before retiring, the men had stood around inside the cottage smoking and drinking cheap brandy while the two young women stood by a fire drying their skirts. The men stumbled out and they could hear them in the wagon swearing and grumbling and singing obscene songs and as the rain continued to fall, eventually all became quiet.

Eleanor, as Olive discovered her travelling companion was called, she thought very beautiful with her flaxen hair and blue eyes. Eleanor said she thought Olive a dark beauty, the most beautiful woman, in fact, she had ever seen. They both blushed and laughed at their mutual admiration. Olive thought them about the same age or her companion a little older, perhaps Eleanor was twenty, but she was too shy to ask. She learned that Eleanor lived at the Fields with her father and brother, and was returning there after visiting an aunt in Queenstown. Her mother had died some years before. This revelation pained Olive; she could not imagine life without her own mother. Rebecca Schreiner was her rock. She recalled wanting to put her arms around Eleanor to express her sorrow for her loss, but Eleanor seemed quite resolute.

It was the middle of summer and extremely hot when they arrived next day, and the sight that greeted her was unexpected, a sight that remained vividly with her to this day. Circling the mine was a sea of canvas and tent poles that appeared to have no order in their arrangement. These were ringed around by native huts. Returning from the market the

following day, she had got lost among the maze of tents. Theo and John had staked a claim that they worked together, or rather directed the twenty men they had engaged to do the digging, paying each two pounds a month. Her first and lasting impression of the camps was the overwhelming number of men to women. There were a few wives and children but apart from her sister, Ettie, no other single women. It was three days before she saw Eleanor again. They were overjoyed and hugged each other like lost souls. When they walked together, they attracted much attention from the men and were outwardly disdainful, but secretly they enjoyed the feeling of empowerment that their youthful beauty bestowed on them. When the time came for her to leave New Rush, Eleanor presented her with a prettily tied bunch of acacia flowers. Olive had dried those flowers too, but with her travels abroad and the passing of years, they had been lost. Theo had not found the huge diamond they had all prayed for, and he and Ettie were eventually forced to leave themselves when their workforce deserted them for the newly discovered gold fields in the Transvaal.

She thought now how fortunate she had been in meeting Eleanor, for she knew at seventeen she had been shy and reticent, and Eleanor with true friendship had given her confidence. Her thoughts turned back on themselves to Fan, her sister-in-law in Cape Town, and how pained and lonely she had felt during her stay with her brother's family when she first arrived in the Cape from England. Fan had no kind words, and seemed almost to resent the affection Will displayed towards his sister. She sighed, swallowing her hurt, and opened her exercise book to a blank page. She picked up her pen: *I have an old brown carved box…I have in it a rose. When my faith in woman flickers, and her present is an agony to me and her future a despair, the scent of that dead rose…comes back to me.*

Against her will to quell it, her interest in Cape politics did not abate. If anything, it was absorbing more of her everyday thoughts. Returning to South Africa after so many years absent, she saw her country and countrymen with a different consciousness that brought a greater clarity and understanding. She wrote to Havelock, 'after these long years of being buried in abstract thought, I am drinking in the external world through every pore.' She had now been six months in Matjesfontein, and had become acquainted with all who lived and worked in the hamlet, including the men who laboured in the railway gangs. They were of the dark races: Griqua, Bushmen, Bantu and Khoi. Occasionally, she would stop and chat to them about their work. She wanted to know how they were paid: was it by the

day, the week or month, and how much? They mostly spoke the *Taal*, a derivative of the language of the country's first colonisers from Holland. She understood it. She wished to know had any of them worked on farms. One had, and when pushed he admitted that his 'Baas' had not treated him well. 'Did he use the strop on you?' she asked. The man turned his head away refusing to acknowledge her question and continued with his digging.

The country's labouring class, it had become clear to her, was made up almost entirely of natives. Her thoughts went back to her experience in England visiting the oppressive mills of Lancashire, and the depressing extremes of wealth and poverty between Englishmen that she had witnessed there. She began to see that South Africa was different; here it was racial segregation that drove the wheels of capitalism. She had seen it on the diamond fields of New Rush and on the farms where she had worked as a governess, but it hadn't registered then; she was colour blinded to the relationship between owner and labourer that existed, then as now, in South Africa.

She survived her first winter in her small and draughty cottage with coals brought up from Cape Town. The coals she burnt at night and she stayed warm in the day by throwing on her heavy English coat which she buttoned to the collar. Will's planned visit to Matjesfontein had been dashed by the change of government and the extra demands placed on him, so that by the close of September, Olive was restless to be in a broader company. The weather warmed and the days lengthened, and she sent word to her brother, and to Seymour Fort, that she was coming down. There were a number of items of personal business to attend to, and people to speak with, including Mr and Mrs Sauer who had responded generously to her letter, sent to them after the news of Rhodes' appointment to the Premiership broke. She was disappointed, she said, that Mr Sauer had not taken up the position, so good and noble a man whose character would have eminently suited the role.

She met Seymour Fort at the same restaurant, in the Botanical Gardens. The spring weather had turned blustery and showers had been slewing in all morning. Dispensing with their umbrellas and coats, they found a table inside the café and talked in a small, inconsequential way while their meals were prepared. The rain, she imagined, was something that Seymour Fort was familiar with, living as he had in the tropical zone.

‘Not so much,’ he said. ‘We lived in Port Moresby and it lies in a rain shadow. It was different when we travelled to the interior, our capes were rarely off our backs.’ Olive confessed to not knowing very much about New Guinea.

‘Does it belong to the Empire?’ she asked. Seymour Fort smiled, a little imperiously, she thought. Her limited schooling and lack of a formal education always caused Olive a silent pain. Seymour Fort continued.

‘When Germany annexed the northern part of the country, General Scratchley saw it as a matter of urgency that Britain annex Papua and he wrote, or rather got me to write, to the Colonial Office in London. The response surprised us all.’ Pushing away her shame, Olive steadied her eyes on Fort’s and rubbed her hands together.

‘Do tell, what did the letter say?’ He gave a guttural laugh.

‘It said, ‘Her Majesty has black subjects enough!’’ Olive tilted her chin in a sceptical manner.

‘It is as true as I sit here, Miss Schreiner, they were the exact words.’

‘Well now, Mr Seymour Fort,’ she said, ‘what do you think will be the Queen’s response to the ascension of the British South Africa Company’s managing director to lead Her Majesty’s government in the Cape?’ Seymour Fort glanced around him then lowered his voice.

‘As you now know, it was Rhodes, not Sauer, who attended on the Governor. While he waited to see His Excellency, Mr Rhodes didn’t speak to me once, he just sat gazing out the window.’

Olive shared with him the details of her meeting with Mr Rhodes at Matjesfontein, how she had begged the man not to be tempted to the Premiership. Seymour Fort listened intently then raised his shoulders and uttered a sigh of resignation.

‘Do you think,’ she went on, ‘that the strop bill may offer a clue?’

‘The ‘every man wallop his nigger’ bill,’ he said scornfully. ‘It was defeated, though Rhodes voted in its favour.’

‘That is my point. He was the only member of the Progressives in Parliament that did. It was the numbers that he was after, the numbers that handed him the leadership, and who did he do deals with to get the numbers? The Afrikander Bond party needed his support to bring the strop bill forward.’ Olive’s insight into *realpolitik* allowed her a satisfied smirk, but she felt no less indignant.

The rain eased, the clouds broke up and sunlight shivered on the glass panes transforming the café interior from gloomy to cheerful. Other patrons murmured their

relief and readied themselves to make a hurried exit while the weather held. Seymour Fort helped her on with her rain-cape and reclaimed their brollies. They stepped outside.

'When we next meet, we must avoid local politics and speak only of literature and social matters,' he said. She laughed, feeling a kindred spirit in Seymour Fort and put out her hand of farewell. He took it, but then did something that surprised and startled her. He leant in stooping and lightly brushed her cheek with his lips.

CHAPTER FOUR

November 1890

The Sauers arrived as they had promised before the year was out, and booked into Logan's Hotel. Olive went down to meet them at the station. Mr Sauer, dapper as ever in his morning suit, portmanteau in one hand and a perfectly rolled brolly in the other, stepped down onto the platform before helping his wife down. Olive bustled towards them and Mary, a tall willowy figure, smiled and laughed and lifted the veil on her wide brimmed hat, bending to kiss her. Mr Logan sent a boy for the luggage and Olive suggested they might like to follow him to their hotel to freshen. The visitors arranged to meet her in the railway restaurant at eleven, for tea and sandwiches.

At first glance, Olive thought Mr Sauer looked drained and she wondered how the events of the past few months had played on him. But in her company now, and away from the stresses of Parliamentary life, he seemed relaxed and in a jolly mood. He had changed out of his morning suit and was sporting a hunting jacket and plus fours. Mary looked relaxed, too, but her attentiveness to her husband conveyed a level of anxiety for him, and when Olive raised the matter of Rhodes appointment, Mary cast her eyes down and smoothed the folds of her dress. Mr Sauer chose to redirect the conversation.

'You know, Miss Schreiner,' he said, 'we had a long chat, William and I. It was pleasing for me to discover how many views we share. Rhodes and the rest of us would do anything to help him at an election.'

Reminded of her brother, Olive's reaction was conflicted. She felt pride and concern that he be tempted to a political career. She believed Will was too good for politics; either he would not survive when forced to make choices between principle and expediency, or his fortitude for doing right would be weakened. She smiled politely and shifted the conversation to matters at hand. She wanted to show them her kopje, she said, where much of her creative thinking took place.

Leaving the refreshment room, the white heat of mid-day beat down on them. Sauer opened his brolly to protect the women, and Olive laughed.

'Mr Sauer, if you had lived through as many English winters as I have, you would embrace the African sun like a primeval God.' She would come for them at their hotel at

four o'clock when the sun was low, she said, and they could take their stroll out on the veld before dinner.

The Sauers were waiting for her at the agreed time and together they walked the length of the street, Olive pointing out to them her house with its name plaque as they passed. 'Quite the celebrity,' said Mr Sauer approvingly. They reached the village boundary and were soon in the heart of the veld, the 'Great Karroo' they called it, and Olive felt the pride of ownership, as if this country belonged to her alone. The friends crossed to the dirt track, a light dusting of red earth coating their boots as they walked. Though the late afternoon sun had lost its fierceness, Sauer insisted on walking between the women with his brolly held aloft to shade them. Olive took his arm and from behind his shoulder, exchanged amused glances with Mary. They had not progressed far when a shadow passed over them causing them to stop and look up. A black eagle was hanging in the sky, not twenty yards in front. They heard the rapid seesaws of sound as it dived to the ground swooping up a small animal in its powerful claws. 'Oh my, I hope it was a mouse and not a dassie,' said Mary.

'It was a mouse,' said Olive. Reaching the kopje, Sauer turned to her.

'You know, Miss Schreiner, you cannot take me to a mountain and expect me not to climb it.' They laughed and urged him on and he began his assault on the small hill, picking his way carefully over the boulders.

'This is so good for John', Mary said, 'to forget for a moment the pressures of office.' Olive heard Mary's concerns and her heart went out to her friend.

'I'm going to order up for him some of my iron and quinine mixture. I have found it a wonderful boost to one's energy,' she said. Sauer had reached the summit and turned and waved, and they returned his wave. Olive looked at Mary. 'Has Mr Logan spoken to you about me?'

'No, what would he be speaking about?'

'Someone has been gossiping. Unbeknown to myself, it seems I have become engaged.'

'To a man?'

'To my friend, Mr. Seymour Fort. Don't misunderstand me, Mary, it would be an honour to any woman, no matter how noble and good to have her name connected with Mr Fort's. But I am not a marrying woman and nothing would be further from my mind.' The import of Seymour Fort's demonstrable affection outside the Gardens café was brought rudely home to her when she began receiving congratulatory letters on her

impending marriage. She felt anger, first at the presumption and then at the reckless gossip. She wondered who among the other diners at the Gardens might have recognised her. While her anger simmered over these letters from people she barely knew, she thought again of her life in London, a city where there were no secrets, or at least she believed, people were honest with each other concealing nothing and dealing straight. In that great metropolis, it was only the cult of personality most often promoted by men in the media, that Olive had disliked. But that was different. Here in the Cape, gossip and rumour were rife, and people seemed to thrive on intrigue and innuendo of a very personal nature. It was not only distasteful, but unjust and hurtful. Olive turned to Mary,

'I cannot understand why people have such difficulty in accepting that a woman can have a true friendship with a man unconnected by blood, without sex affection.'

'Oh, Olive, you are so clever to think like that,' said Mary. Olive felt her friend's sincerity and admiration, and wondered what Mary's married life was like.

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Olive watched as Seymour Fort moved about inside the Gardens restaurant to find them a table. She had stubbornly refused to be cowed by the Colony's gossipers. The summer was upon them and she was visiting the capital to have altered a dress that she planned to wear to Bloemfontein. She had received an official invitation from President Reitz, as had Cape Parliamentarians, newspaper editors, and other notables, to the ceremonial opening of the railway line extension to the capital of the Orange Free State that bordered the Colony. Built on a riverbank that gave its name to the Republic, Bloemfontein had been established by the Dutch 'voortrekkers' who had moved north-east when the British first arrived in the Cape. Seymour Fort beckoned her over to a table about to be vacated by an elderly couple. Helping his wife out of her chair, the man spoke in friendly terms to Seymour, but Olive thought the woman gave her friend a rather aggressive stare and then an odd glance at her. Perhaps the husband recognised her or even Seymour Fort for, unlike his wife who had already shuffled off, the man bowed to them graciously.

The friends settled to conversation. She didn't mention to him the letters she had received but directed their talk to the opening of the line linking the two capitals.

'His Excellency has been invited to stand with President Reitz,' said Fort. 'The plan is that they will cut the ribbon together.' Olive knew that Mr Rhodes, as Premier of

the Cape Colony would also be part of the official group and wondered how he might feel about being upstaged by Sir Henry. The thought did not detain her for long.

She said, 'Do you know who President Reitz is? No reason why you should, of course. Mr Frank Reitz is my sister-in-law's brother. He is much older than Fan, I think the first born in a large family. I haven't met him myself yet.'

'I had wondered about Mrs Schreiner. I detected an Afrikaner accent when we were first introduced,' he said.

'She's a good woman, stands by William in all he does.' The waitress arrived to take their orders. When their choices were made, Olive returned to where they had left off.

'You'll be travelling with the official party, won't you, Seymour?'

'I'll assist with the drafting and typing of Sir Henry's speech, but as it is close to Christmas, I have elected not to go.'

'Are you going home, then?'

'No, but I'm going overseas.' He grinned. 'I'm going to Robben Island,' he said.

'Goodness, whatever for?'

'The Doctor Superintendent has invited me.' She accepted this as reason enough for a single man like Seymour Fort, though she could not understand why he would want to be away from the Lochs during the season of gaiety, when Adela and other young women would surely make a fuss of him as the only bachelor in the house.

'I would be glad to hear about the conditions there; if they have improved,' she said. 'The English were most disturbed after reports reached the British press about the squalidness of the place.' Olive summoned up an image, not of the individual wretches afflicted by leprosy who were detained on the island, but of the women incarcerated there for alleged mental instability. 'I would be grateful, too, if you would give an assessment of the Island's lunatic asylums, especially how the females are treated.' She paused and fixed her eyes on her friend. 'You do understand, don't you Seymour, that women's suffering is a burden to me. I could not visit the asylums myself. I wore myself down trying to help destitute women when I lived in London. I took them into my own home, fed them, gave them my bed, but they were gone again in the morning, back onto the streets where they made their living, many of them as sex slaves.' A frown appeared between Seymour Fort's eyes; he couldn't look at her but nodded sympathetically as he stirred his soup.

‘I cannot do that again,’ she said. ‘I was exhausted, verging on a nervous breakdown; it is why I had to leave London.’ Seeing her companion’s discomfort, she checked herself and took up her spoon.

‘Pumpkin soup, my favourite.’ She shifted the conversation. ‘What are you reading?’

The Mayor of Casterbridge. Have you read it?’

‘No, but I don’t much like Mr Hardy’s writing. It is my opinion that he fingers his characters too lightly. I prefer to read Charles Dickens; his characters touch me more deeply.’ Olive had no wish to discourage her new friend from his literary interests but she had grown to detest the fetishising of art that the middle classes at home and here in South Africa engaged in. She paused to take a mouthful of soup. ‘This may surprise you, Seymour, but I don’t much like reading novels.’

That night she dreamt. It was a haunted dream, peopled by the flickering presences of women in distress. They were children really, dressed in the cheap clothes and adornments of women; most wore high-heeled shoes, their weak ankles barely able to support them as they walked. They were coming towards her, first one then another, she saw them dressed in petticoats to which mud from the street had adhered and over which they had thrown coats for warmth. Some were made of fur, but in each case their coats carried grubby stains, left over from spillages of food or drink. They wore no gloves, but their fingers were bedecked with rings. They wore a strange assortment of bonnets positioned lopsidedly over roughened curls. They held out their hands as each came towards her in turn, their faces hungry and pleading but as she reached for them, they vanished from her vision and so it went on, one after the other. The last to arrive was an older woman, older than herself and similarly attired to the younger women and her face, brightly painted with rouge and lip colour. The woman smiled, mockingly, at Olive. The closer she came the more grotesque her features became, taking on the face of a man.

Olive woke in a sweat and cried out. She realised she was not at home but at her brother’s house. She hoped that no members of the family had been disturbed. The room in which she slept had become hot, the air close and she moved to the window to open it. It had been raining when she returned there late in the afternoon from her day visiting friends and she had closed the sash. Someone after her had bolted it closed and she had been unable to reach the bolt. She sat on the bedroom chair for a moment to fully waken then she climbed atop to unlock the bolted sash.

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She strolled up and down the station platform, her stomach a-flutter, twirling her black ribboned, broad-brimmed sun hat in her fingers. She was waiting for the party of prominent citizens travelling to Bloemfontein to arrive. She felt comfortable in her black dress with its expanded waist-line—an alteration made by the Adderley street tailor—and pondered on the consequences of the slow pace of her life in South Africa. Her London life came to her in flashing pictures of herself: bustling about, going hither and thither, attending Club meetings, visiting her many friends, running for the omnibus, other times climbing stairs to and from the underground. How quickly her life had changed to a sedentary existence, and she ate better than she had ever done in the home country. She glanced at the small leather strapped case that rested on the platform and into which she had packed her crinolines and toiletries. The invitation included overnight accommodation at the President's house. The Sauers had said she could ride with them, joining the conveyance train as it passed through the hamlet. Olive was glad she would have Mary for company, for she always felt conspicuous when alone in the company of eminent persons.

She had forgotten, she realised, as people poured out of the train, that Matjesfontein was a coffee stop, and as the pots and mugs were brought out for the official party, she fell in with the Sauers who were delighted to see her. Others approached seeking an introduction, among them the editor of *The Cape Times*. She found it amusing that being the most famous resident of this little railway siding should excite people's interest. She glanced at Mr Rhodes but in the company of others, he seemed oblivious to her presence. Coffee cups were cleared away and there was a jostling and shuffling of passengers as they made their way back onto the platform for reboarding. Standing in line, she felt his closeness before she saw him. He was behind her, she turned and smiled, and with a begrudging humility she congratulated him on his appointment to the Premiership. As the Sauers looked for a seat for Olive, Rhodes declared there was a vacant seat next to him if she would like to join him. She accepted the offer.

Journeying through a countryside bristling with summer life, Olive and Mr Rhodes avoided discussing politics, turning instead to literature. She was pleasantly surprised to discover that he read widely, many of the same books that she herself had enjoyed. History books mostly, Gibbon on *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and some books of a scientific nature, though he seemed to have a penchant for heroic men of

history. A biography of the Emperor Titus, and Lord Rosebury's biography of Napoleon Bonaparte were top of his list, he said. There were meditations too: his, a well-thumbed copy of Marcus Aurelius; hers, The Old Testament, inherited from her father, she said. To demonstrate their powers of memory, they each in turn quoted their favourite passages, Olive learning a little more of Rhodes, and he, she hoped, learning a little more about her.

CHAPTER FIVE

February 1891

A shaft of early morning sunlight penetrated the pane, settling on her desk and encouraging an early start on the day's work. Instead, she found herself writing a letter in the still, peaceful hours before the outside world stirred and entered her consciousness. It was addressed to Havelock. Even while oceans and distance separated them, to her Harry would always be her 'other self'—a sobriquet she had ascribed to him long ago, that captured the essence of an intensely felt relationship and shared sympathy.

The old black-covered exercise book that contained her novel in progress lay open upon her desk. '*From Man to Man!'* she said aloud and liked what she heard. She read through the synopsis that she had penned in London. The novel's heroines, Bertie and Rebekah, were sisters 'torn apart by a cruel twist of fate'. She pondered on her choice of words. It wasn't fate—their sad lives, she knew, a symptom of the social order where women remained economically unequal to men, and dependent. She believed that as long as this inequality persisted, the whole human race would remain shackled, men as well as women, unable to progress to a higher intelligence and humanity. She drew a line through the offending sentence. She loved her story, a story that had captured her imagination in her youth and carried her forward, growing and developing as she grew and developed her own mental and emotional strength during her years abroad.

Before she left England, she shared the story with Havelock and with Karl Pearson: to the latter she included a ten-page missive, summarising its plot line and structure. She asked him that when her story was published, would he allow her to dedicate the book to him? Anticipating his response, she teasingly parodied in the letter what he might say: 'No, no. I could not allow my name to be associated with this book. It is not the moral aspect that I object to, it is the emotion!' The women of the Club had rallied to defend emotion as valid and reliable evidence of human experience, while Pearson and another male member insisted that emotion had no place in scientific enquiry. If the Woman Question was to be properly understood, Pearson had argued, emotion should be dismissed. Yet his response to her story when it came, was not to criticise the emotion, rather he called her a 'grave digger' because like in *An African Farm*, she had a central character die.

She had not asked any of her English women friends to read her manuscript, not even Amy Levy, her poet friend. She had yet to meet a woman she felt her intellectual equal. It was not, she believed, because men were more intelligent, but rather that women's lives were bound by the limited imagination of others. She had met clever women in London, at the Club, but even in that cauldron of free thought and radicalism, it was the men who assumed authority, setting the agenda. The tragedy of Amy's life, and death by suicide, reminded Olive of the inward compression on women of social boundaries.

Havelock, on the other hand, had always looked for the artistic value in her work. When she gave him her manuscript to read, she had said that the less he thought her story artistic, the happier she would be. It was a critical turning point, an admission to herself as much as to her friend, that her creative writing had moved in a new direction; she had broken away from the defined needs of the novel to make it into something more. In writing out her protagonist's philosophical interpolations—conveyed as conversation with her children—she had found a new freedom, a novelistic way to express what was in her own heart and head. 'Rebekah', she had later confessed to Havelock, 'is me'.

Her thoughts turned to 'baby Bertie', Rebekah's young sister, a girl of feeble mind who Rebekah was always looking out for. She thought of her own little sister Ellie, who had not survived infancy. Had she, however unconsciously, bestowed on Bertie the weakness of her own dead sister? She recalled the memory of herself as the nine-year-old little mother who had wanted always to keep her baby sister safe. She had lain by her sister's side—Ellie was just two—holding her hand until they took the dead child away. She remembered how her father had to peel back her fingers, the floods of tears that followed and how she had to be taken to her room to save her mother further grief. That memory haunted her and now did battle with her desire to move her story forward. She lit a cigarette and paced about, waiting for the breakfast hour.

The day, begun with good intentions vanished when flicking through her mail, she saw a letter arrived from Mr Seymour Fort. She opened it. It was a short note and carried no detail other than to announce he would shortly be leaving for England and hoped that he could see her before his departure. She found it puzzling for there had been no mention of his plan when last they met, nor in his recent correspondence. She valued their regular and sympathetic exchange throughout the year, leading her most recently to request of Seymour Fort that he act as literary executor of her Will. The nomination was intended to demonstrate her respect for the man's sincerity and trustworthiness—a mark of the esteem in which he was held. It was not the first Will that she had drafted, feeling as she had

often done in London when she struggled for breath, that she would not make fifty and may even die before reaching forty. Since settling in Matjesfontein her asthma attacks were rare, but a Will remained important as a statement of her worth—financial and literary.

She wrote immediately in reply, giving Seymour Fort the address of Havelock Ellis in London. She asked how long would he be gone and would he be returning to his post in Cape Town? A second letter arrived two days later. He may not go to England, he said, as he was making enquiries about Mashonaland. Mr Rhodes, he said, had offered him a management position if he wished to accompany the pioneer column travelling to the interior. On the matter of his employment with the Governor, Seymour Fort remained silent. She was alarmed.

She hadn't planned a visit to Cape Town so early in the year but she sensed Seymour Fort was in some kind of trouble and felt obliged to reconsider. She booked a hotel at Sea Point where she knew she could find solitude and carry on with her work. Summer was always lovely at the Cape, especially by the seaside, and it would be a last opportunity before the season slipped away. She dashed off letters to Will, to the Sauers and to Adela, and advised Mr Logan of her imminent departure, requesting that he keep an eye on her cottage. Logan offered to sub-let it for her; he was having more visitors now to the hotel and it would not be difficult to find a short stay tenant, he said. She thanked him but would not countenance the idea. The cottage meant more to her than a place to store her private possessions; it had become her sanctuary. After so many years of wandering, living in English boarding houses, staying in hotels and convents, or in the houses of friends and family with its attendant frustrations and insecurities, to have found a place she could call her own was of priceless value. She told Logan she would be away for a month and wrote him a cheque to cover her absence. She gave her Cape Town address to Mr van Wyk for mail forwarding.

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Throwing open the windows of her room at Queen's Hotel, her breath caught. White froth dotted the aquamarine shore, and she shifted her gaze out to sea where the colour, as if drawn by a child's colouring pencil, changed from aquamarine to deep blue. There was a slight swell as the afternoon breeze rolled in. She paused, breathing in the salt air then turned from the window to drink her tea and unpack her case. Sitting at the small table,

she dashed off notes to Seymour Fort and to Adela suggesting they meet for lunch at the Gardens café. This time, she received a reply from Adela only. She would be very pleased to see Olive again, the young woman wrote, but could she come to Newlands because she was not yet fully recovered from a malady that had laid her low for a month. Olive knew that the journey from Sea Point to Newlands would be twice as long, but this did not trouble her. The Wynberg train stopped at several stations before Newlands, one of these being Rondebosch where her story's protagonist, Rebekah, lived. Olive had lived inside her character's head for so many years, Rebekah felt so absolutely real to her and she liked to imagine she would meet her coming down one of the suburb's leafy avenues.

At the Residency it was Lady Loch who greeted her, gushing somewhat excessively as though they had not met for a whole year, yet Elizabeth Loch was one of her more regular correspondents. Only a month ago the lady had written a beautiful and tender letter about Olive's *Dreams* book, and in Bloemfontein, shortly before Christmas, the two women had met and exchanged pleasantries.

'You have caught us in a bit of an upheaval, Miss Schreiner,' she said ushering Olive into the sitting room. 'We are preparing for the arrival of my sister and her daughter, Lady Constance. It will be good for Adela to have company her own age here a while before she returns to England. She has not been well you know.'

'Yes, she told me in her letter. I'm sorry to hear it. I had suggested we meet in the Gardens. Do we know what has caused her malady?'

Olive had greatly admired Lady Loch for her gracious manner and calm eyes but now the lady appeared flustered and confused and averted her eyes.

'She has seen a doctor and he has given her a tincture of some sort. She appears to be on the mend. It is good of you to come, Miss Schreiner, Adela likes to have visitors.' Olive smiled benignly and waited patiently. She wanted to ask after Mr Seymour Fort, was he still working for Sir Henry, but she sensed something amiss in the household and wondered if it had to do with Seymour Fort and Adela.

'And here is our dear one,' said Lady Loch bouncing up. Olive stood, too, as Adela appeared at the door. She held out her hands to Adela who, it saddened her to see, appeared gaunt and drained of the old enthusiasm and sparkle.

'Hello, Olive.' Adela looked at her aunt, then back to Olive. 'Would you like tea? We could take it in the conservatory if you like.' Adela's aunt seemed a little undecided whether to join them and as there was no clear invitation extended from her niece, she

excused herself fussing about preparations to be made and her sister due to arrive at week's end.

Adela wandered off. She looked around for the maid to bring tea and Olive said that her aunt had sent for it. In the conservatory they sat at the iron-laced table and Olive reached out to Adela with heart and hands. Tears started up in the young woman's eyes, her face was full of sorrow, and it hurt to see her young friend so utterly diminished. Calmly, she asked Adela to tell her what had happened to Mr Seymour Fort. He had left two weeks ago, said Adela. She didn't know where he had gone. There had been a huge row between her uncle and his secretary and he had stripped Mr Fort of his position. He had left suddenly; there had hardly been time for her to say goodbye. The tears welled again and she sniffled and Olive offered her a handkerchief.

'You loved him, didn't you Adela?'

'He was honourable, Olive. He asked Uncle for my hand in marriage but Uncle flew into a rage.'

This did not sound like the Sir Henry Olive had grown to know, a man whose jovial charm and easy manner she greatly admired. Despite his regal position, the Governor was not one to stand on ceremony when in the company of lesser fellows. She could not understand why he would rush to sever a relationship of long standing with Seymour Fort, when he need only have said Adela was too young for marriage, or that she was in their temporary care and needed to return to her parents' house. She looked at her questioningly.

'Seymour had come back you see, from Robben Island, before Aunt and Uncle had returned from Bloemfontein.' Adela sucked back her tears. 'He went again, but he had been seen and at our Christmas party, Aunt and Uncle learnt about it from a most unkind guest.' Adela's sobbing faulted and her eyes fired up. 'Olive, it was horrible and so unfair.'

She believed Adela where others may not have, and she believed that Seymour Fort had acted honourably. Adela's suffering reminded her of her own youthful heart and of the man who had stolen it and made promises that he was, finally, unwilling to keep. A shiver ran through her. The man in her youth had been anything but honourable. She sometimes wondered if the stress she had suffered from her phantom pregnancy all those years ago had been the cause of her subsequent debilitating and chronic asthma.

Passing through Rondebosch on the outward journey, ideas for how she might bring her much laboured-over novel to a conclusion had flashed on Olive, but the unsettling events at the Residency and Adela's distress had left her so sore of heart that those ideas had slipped away from her. Her immediate concern was for Seymour. Returned to her hotel, she wrote to Havelock advising him that her friend, Mr Seymour Fort, may soon be in England and may wish to make contact. She asked that he please try to like him, 'he's very like you', she wrote. She did not mention Seymour Fort's dismissal, or his entanglement with the Governor's niece. She blushed recalling her earlier letters to Havelock telling him about her new friend, even once claiming that Seymour Fort 'loves me', but she had hastened to reassure that 'now I keep all men who love me at a great distance'. It was no fantasy; she had truly felt Seymour Fort's love for her, but she knew it was a love of admiration and respect and a shared sympathy. She had been glad for his friendship and was now equally saddened by his sudden departure. In that moment, Olive realised, if she was to stay in South Africa, she must turn to her own countrymen and women for affection.

Will and Fan and the children drove down to Sea Point on Will's day off. Their latest addition to the family, baby Oliver, had been left in the care of the nursemaid. They dined in the hotel's restaurant and then took the children to the beach where they roamed under the watchful eyes of their parents and aunt. Getting ahead of the adults, the children found the rock pools and were wading in. Fan ran after them. Watching her go, Olive seized the moment alone with her brother to speak to him of financial matters.

'I have written to Fred at Eastbourne, to say that he need not give me the usual maintenance allowance this year as sales from my *Dream* book are doing well. At a penny in the pound the royalty is small, but the publishers are already on their third print run. If the dear old fellow likes to give it me he can, but I wanted him to know that I can manage without.' She looked up at Will's handsome bearded face that with age and experience, she thought, seemed to grow more like Papa's. She laughed. 'Next year, if my novel is done, I mean to be flowing in riches!'

'I'm sure Fred will appreciate the offer,' he said, putting his arm around her and giving a gentle squeeze. He broke into a gentle trot towards the rock pools. Watching him go, her heart swelled with familial love and affection.

She loved the sound of the sea: the crashing of the waves on the shore when the wind was up or on calmer evenings listening to the gentle flop, flop of the eternal tide lapping against the sand. In the mornings, she walked along the seashore, taking off her boots so that the silt oozed between her toes. She rested on the rocks to watch the busy sea-lanes and the flotilla of fishing boats bobbing about. They were crewed by Cape Malays mostly, whose colourful sarongs wrapped around their torsos or their heads, added to the charm of her atmosphere. In the breakfast room she sat alone; the hotel had fallen quiet with the commencement of the working week, and most Capetonians returned to their suburban homes. In her room, she lifted the window sash closed by the maid. A gust of wind blew in from the sea and she closed it again. She found it difficult to think more about her novel, her emotions unsettled by recent events at the Residency, and she chose instead to turn her mind to a work begun in Matjesfontein. She called it 'A Returned Colonist's View of South Africa'.

The idea had come to her while a guest in Bloemfontein, meeting so many representatives from all the states and colonies—the Presidents of the two Dutch Afrikaner Republics, the Governors of the English colonies of the Cape and Natal—and their wives, and listening to the after-dinner speeches, that encouraged her to the notion that the dominant population of the sub-continent might eventually be half-cast, Dutch and English bonded as one by a shared blood. These thoughts had inspired her to try her hand at writing in a way she had not written before. With a new vitality she had begun her narrative where she believed South Africa's story began, delineating its nature and topography. Pleased with her ability to write plain, so clearly and so well, inclined her to write to Havelock with the news that her 'reaching out to the external world' had offered her a new direction for her writing. Thus, between strolling on the foreshore and eating, her days at Sea Point became fully absorbed in penning her South African sketch. She allowed herself to imagine how several sketches on different aspects of the country could run to a book length treatise. Next, she would write about South Africa's wonderful mix of people of all races and creeds, but it would remain a personal view; she had no desire to write a history.

CHAPTER SIX

March 1891

Their letters—both carrying invitations—crossed. Olive's to Mary Sauer announced she would be in town on the forthcoming Friday to work in the city library. Could they meet for lunch? Mary's announced a dinner party at her house on the forthcoming Saturday, would Olive like to join the group? The guest list was modest, mostly her husband's colleagues, said Mary, and included Mr Rhodes. She wondered why Mary had made mention of Rhodes and read the invitation as a kind of pairing. Most of John Sauer's parliamentary colleagues were married men, Mr Rhodes being one of few single men in the Parliament. She brought to mind her last meeting with Rhodes, on the train to Bloemfontein, where a seat had been found for her next to the Premier, most likely for the same reason, she thought.

She arrived a little late at the house in Kenilworth and was welcomed by Mr Sauer and led through to the parlour where the dinner crowd had gathered. There were eight guests, and as far as she could tell, all of them members of the Progressive coalition and their wives. She glimpsed Mr Rhodes sitting on the chaise longue in conversation with Mary. He stood, and they shook hands and greeted one another in the familiar manner of old friends. As all the guests indulged in greetings, Mr Merriman, to whom she had not previously been introduced peered down at her from his great height and declared,

'Ah, the famous novelist! And when can we expect the next great novel?' Whether Merriman made his comment to mock or embarrass, she could not tell. She laughed.

'Oh, dear, the word is out!' Others joined in her amusement, and Merriman forced a smile. Sipping their sherry, she fell to talking with Mrs Rose-Innes, a woman to whom she was drawn by the light in her eyes. It was always like this, the eyes told a lot about a person, she thought. Mrs Rose-Innes was about her height, and similarly proportioned, which made her even more endearing to Olive. But the lady, she soon discovered in conversation with her, had other qualities she admired in women required to play second fiddle to their professional husbands—a sturdy sense and sound judgement. As they sat down to eat, she took note of the studied arrangement of guests, and to her relief found that she was not positioned next to Mr Rhodes who was seated at the opposite end of the table from their host. She was seated between Mr and Mrs Merriman. Sitting across from her

were the only two other guests not of the political class, Mary's sister and her husband, who were visiting from Port Elizabeth. Olive became conscious of them both looking at her. They were smiling as though willing her to speak.

'I imagine you travelled to the Cape by boat?' she said. They nodded and complained that it was a rough voyage and said they truly would have preferred to travel in the comfort of a train, but the promised rail link had not yet arrived at Port Elizabeth.

'All in good time, when the Colony can afford it,' said Mr Sauer. 'One thing leads to another. Our first priority is to service the diamond industry.'

Olive looked sharply at her host. 'The people of the town have been waiting a long time, Mr Sauer. As I understand it, the export of grain and wool is now shipped from Cape Town or East London and bypasses Algoa Bay altogether. And what of the poor white farmer?'

All heads turned to her and she felt a rush of blood. She was aware that as the only single woman among the gathering, a certain mysterious appeal was on her side, strengthening her right to be heard. She was confident of her knowledge on matters usually reserved for debate among men, and thought a few feathers ruffled was never a bad thing. Rhodes, who had been quietly listening to the conversation spoke, his falsetto voice commanding everyone's attention. He wanted to know from where had Olive got her ideas about poor white farmers.

'I lived among them, Mr. Rhodes. I was governess to their children. Some of them remain my very best friends.' She was thinking of Erilda Carwood whose life on the land had not been an easy one. Bright with excitement, she felt she had taken command of the table. 'And then there is the policy question of free trade or protection. What is your opinion about this, Mr. Rhodes?' While the English liberals favoured free trade, Rhodes, it was said, was pandering to Cape Dutch wine producers by supporting protection policies.

Glancing sideways at Olive, Mr Merriman snorted, 'Surely a novelist cannot really understand the economic complexities of either policy.'

She felt the sting of the insult as much for her art as herself. She bristled, raising her hands in protest.

'Perhaps we should ask Mr Walters here about the economic life of Eastern Provence farmers,' said Mr Rose-Innes turning to Sauer's brother-in-law. Olive fumed at the interruption, but held her tongue, exchanging glances with Mary.

Mr Walters said, 'I'm not a farmer, Mr Innes, I am in the saddlery business, but most of my customers are farmers, and I hear their complaints.'

Mary begged that her guests change the topic of conversation.

'As one who does not understand economics, I would prefer we talk about social matters. May I ask who has read John Stuart Mill's "Subjection of Women"?' Oh! Happy day! thought Olive, smiling gleefully at Mary. It had been her own recommended reading to her friend. A silence filled the air and Olive levelled questioning stares around the table before fixing her eyes on the snorter. His haughty lift of chin and curled lip at Mary induced in her another rush of blood. How can we expect to progress our social condition when, on the woman question, half the population buries its head like an ostrich? But her words remained trapped on her tongue when Rhodes, gathering up the silences, spoke.

'I have read John Stuart Mill's book.'

She woke to a thick fog settled across the bay, and dragged the small table in her room at Queen's Hotel to the sash window. With nothing to see, she lit a cigarette. She walked about inhaling and exhaling smoke, moved unconsciously to an ash tray and dropped in a half-finished tube. She sat at the table and picked up her pen. By mid-day the fog over the bay had lifted and she found herself looking out across a sky-blue ocean. An off-shore breeze had flattened its surface and she gazed in awe at the glitter and movement caused by refracted sunlight. Satisfied with her morning's writing, she allowed her mind to rest. She read through it. *How*, *from our political states and our discordant races, can a great, a healthy, a united, an organised nation be formed?* It was for Olive, the burning question. She called her essay in draft, 'The South African Problem'.

Mr Rhodes had been much on her mind since the Sauer's dinner party. When she reflected on the evening, she remembered feeling that his parliamentary colleagues were manoeuvering to protect him from criticism, yet Mr Rhodes was entirely open to her, keen to know her thoughts on policy, and social matters more generally. She decided to write to him. She felt no hesitation in writing to the Premier, convincing herself that to not write would suggest she had no interest in him. In her letter, she said that she would like to see him before she left Cape Town. '…it will be a favour to me and help me in my work; but you must not allow this to influence you, if you are not inclined to come, or feel the conventionalities of Cape Town life make it difficult for a man to visit a woman as he would another man. Having lived so long in a larger atmosphere, I am no judge in such matters.' She closed her letter with a reassurance that it was his opinion she was seeking, rather than wishing to give him her own, and '…if you don't want to come, simply don't

write. It will be alright.' She wondered why she added these words. Was she afraid he wouldn't reply?

Rhodes' letter arrived the next day. He explained that he, too, would be leaving Cape Town shortly for England. He asked if she would be able and willing to visit him at 'Groote Schuur'. He proposed the coming Sunday, the only day he had available, he said. He knew of her interest in horticulture and he would like to show her his recently planted out garden. They could, he suggested, take a walk in the pine-woods behind his new property. If she were to take the two o'clock train from Adderley Street station, he would send a trap to collect her from Rondebosch. She replied immediately in the affirmative. She felt a sudden desire to share this news of a personal invitation from the great man with others, but hesitated. To reveal it would surely put herself at risk of being misunderstood. She returned to her composition on South Africa with renewed enthusiasm, penning her thoughts with literary flair until the night closed over. Pushing back her chair, she glimpsed lying on the floor under the table, her black-covered exercise book. She reached for it, aware that she hadn't written a single new word of her novel in progress.

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The old Dutch farmhouse faced the rising sun, bathing it in a golden glow. It was, he said, the reason why he had decided to buy Groote Schuur. By the time of Olive's arrival, the sun had passed over The Devil's Peak, the stark rockface end of Table Mountain, and the grand old house had fallen into shade. The drive up from the main road, passing along an avenue of Scotch firs that almost touched cathedral like, was thrilling, and turning a bend, the house with its colonnaded portico came into view. It was an eighteenth-century house, Rhodes said, built by the Dutch East India Company. He introduced her to other occupants of Groote Schuur. She met first with Mr Herbert Baker, a fresh-faced architect from England who had been commissioned by Rhodes to renovate the house.

They found him kneeling on the verandah at the rear of the house, directing the laying of black and white marble tiles. Baker said he was from Kent and she asked him was he a 'man of Kent' or a 'Kentish man'? He glanced up at her with an appreciative smile and said he was from north of the Medway. Had he been to Eastbourne she wanted to know. It was where she had spent her first year in England, she said. She also told Baker she was a great admirer of John Ruskin, and asked had he read Mr Ruskin's books? Yes, he was indeed a follower of Ruskin and of William Morris, but… 'I am opposed to conscious straining after invention or originality,' he said with a mild air of pomposity.

Rhodes stood back seeming to enjoy listening to their repartee, perhaps, she thought, learning a little more about the young architect whom he had engaged.

Walking her inside, Rhodes introduced her to his secretary, Mr Metcalf. He asked Metcalf if he would organise tea for Miss Schreiner and himself and Dr Jameson who would be joining them in the drawing room. She thought she saw the man flinch. Mr Rhodes showed her first to the adjoining library, where on floor to ceiling shelves he kept his books. Most were large volumes bound in red morocco, but among them was a slim volume that he now produced. It was John Stuart Mill's *England and Ireland.*

'I have a confession to make, Miss Schreiner. This is the book of Mill's that I was referring to when we had our lively conversation at the Sauer's. Anything else that followed was pure speculation on my part, but I thought you did a splendid job on Merriman.' He gave a high laugh and she raised her eyebrows.

'And you, Sir, did a splendid job on me!' She took the book.

'I would be interested in your opinion on the Irish question, Mr Rhodes, but first I must examine your library.' She ran her fingers across works from the ancient classics; Aeschylus, Aristides, Catullus, Dio Cassius, Euripides, Horace, Plautus, a book on the wives of twelve Caesars, and something called *Erotic Epigrams*. She was intrigued by Rhodes' literary interest and remarked on it.

'I had them all translated.'

He mumbled that the antiquarian bookseller he had employed to scout for rare books had got carried away and he was forced to draw a halt to his collection that now ran to one thousand books. 'Not all requiring translation,' he added. They were spread around the house, in his bedroom, some in his bathroom, he said. She followed him into the drawing room, surprised at the sparseness of its furnishings and fixtures. There were no paintings on the walls, some eighteenth-century antique furnishings that he said he had shipped from Ireland, and several sculptures. Rhodes artistic preference seemed to be for this art form. Several pieces of solid stone phalli were dotted about and an impressive collection of African birds: one a large abstract carving made from soapstone, other smaller sculptures made from wood.

As she took her seat on the lounge, she noticed on a side table set against the wall, a medical bag resting. Rhodes offered a cigarette. He lit one for himself and held the flame for her. She drew in smoke and exhaled, and he brought up an ash tray.

'Yes, Parnell,' she said, 'a very great man, perhaps the only man in Ireland to have been able to bring into the Commons for serious debate the question of Home Rule for his

country. Gladstone wanted it, too. Now, there's another great man. Have you met Mr Gladstone, Mr Rhodes? I count him and his daughter, Mary, among my friends.'

'Gladstone, no, but I have met Mr Parnell. The press has been giving him a hard time.'

'It seems to me the press always gives good and honest people a hard time. How is Mr Parnell? I heard he was not well.'

'He came to see me when I was last in London. I contributed ten thousand pounds to his party.'

'In my opinion, ten thousand pounds too much!' Olive turned her head sharply to see who had spoken. The little man standing behind her chair, she presumed, was Dr Jameson. He was smiling cheekily and walked over to Rhodes and gave him a friendly pat. Next to Rhodes, Jameson looked like a child, so small and feline in his features. He approached her and she put out her hand, his gentle grip the trademark of his profession, she thought.

'It is a pleasure to meet you, Miss Schreiner. I have read your book.'

'The pleasure is mine, Mr Jameson. I have heard a little of your exploits in the Interior. I hope to hear more.'

'This man will be coming with me next time,' he said, patting Rhodes good-naturedly on his back. After tea, Rhodes stood and carried the ashtray to a large bronze spittoon, returning it emptied of its ash.

'Shall we walk, Miss Schreiner, and we can talk some more,' he said.

There was a ravine running down the side of the house, overgrown with hydrangea bushes, like a blue mist; they were in flower and she stood a moment to admire the brilliance of colour. 'They came with the house. Probably planted by the first occupants one hundred years ago,' he said. 'My gardener has been doing some planting out. I hope you approve.' They followed around passing pelargonium and arum lilies. She bent down to caress their petals. The plumbago bushes, not yet in flower would turn a pale blue in the winter months, he said. He ushered her in the direction of an old out-house explaining it was where Baker slept, not because he was required to stay there but…

'…he's an artist, you know, like yourself, and creative minds need a solitary space.' Against the crumbling cottage wall, an old bougainvillea tree cascaded scarlet.

'It was a house for the slaves until that despicable practice was abolished,' he said. 'Herbert thinks he hears their moans at night but I have assured him it is only the pine needles rustling in the wind.'

Rhodes pointed to a row of pine trees edging his property at the foot of the mountain.

'Fifteen hundred acres over there which I intend to make my own as soon as the house renovations are complete.'

They approached the wooded foothills and continued along tracks strewn with pine needles and leaf debris, weaving in and out of the shaded canopy. Rhodes began to talk on a more personal level, sharing his life experiences. Olive discovered they had much in common: their family's religion—both fathers were preachers of the non-conformist sects—their feelings for the mother country (Rhodes was an Englishman born and raised), and their love of South Africa. She thought that of all the men she had known, Mr Rhodes was the most like her. They had grown up in devout families knowing God, yet in households where wide reading and the exploration of ideas were encouraged. And they both considered themselves free thinkers, rejecting the religious dogma of their parents.

She said, 'I have written an essay, a small thing on South Africa and her peoples. I would like to show it you. I would value your opinion above anyone else's, Mr Rhodes.' He did not look at her but followed with his gaze along the path leading them back down the slope.

'And what do you think of South Africa's peoples?'

'I think, Mr Rhodes, that in this country we have the most wonderful mix of races; the problem is how to unite them into one independent nation.'

Rhodes was silent, as though he was giving thought to her problem.

'Leave your paper with Metcalf; he'll pass it on to me.'

He stopped abruptly, and swinging his body slowly around with an outstretched arm in a large circling movement, he said 'On this land, once it is in my possession, I intend to create a zoo, not enclosed in the way of English zoos, but a wide, open space where animals can tread freely. I must have my lions and tigers roaming about in their natural state: I cannot have them cooped up in a little den.'

A wry smile crossed her face. Was Rhodes more comfortable talking about flora and fauna than about people? she wondered.

'Very admirable, Mr Rhodes, but how do you intend to keep safe from your wild animals the human occupants of Groote Schuur?' Rhodes penetratingly blue eyes lit up.

'It's all in the imagination, Miss Schreiner; perhaps you can think of a way. Now, perhaps we should return to the house for our supper before the lions have us for theirs.'

They found Metcalfe and Baker waiting for them in the drawing room. Metcalfe informed them that they would be just four for supper; Dr Jameson was feeling unwell and had retired early. She asked if she might have another cigarette before they went in. Metcalfe joined her and they stood by the open door near the spittoon. Dropping her ash into it, she saw something that she recognised. Thrown in the spittoon, lying on top of the old ash was a syringe. Steeling her eye, she could just make out the writing on the label. 'Morphia'. Then she noticed the medical bag had been removed from the side table. She wondered what ailment afflicted Dr Jameson.

CHAPTER SEVEN

April 1891

Olive was not impressed when she returned to Matjesfontein to find the hamlet overrun with visitors. Jimmy Logan had made extensions to his hotel, and the hamlet, nestled in the high country of the Karroo, was being touted as a kind of health resort, a location for those with respiratory problems. Hotel guests with not much else to do passed by her cottage on a regular basis, stopping and peering in and when one lady approached her door and knocked, she opened it with simmering annoyance.

'Miss Schreiner? Please excuse me if I have interrupted you but when I learnt that you were living in Matjesfontein, I told Alice that I would introduce myself. Forgive me, my name is Miss Molteno.' Olive's stern and formidable expression melted away and her face opened out.

'The Prime Minister's daughter?'

'Ex-prime minister, yes. Forgive me, Miss Schreiner. I looked for you a week ago but they told me you were in Cape Town, and now I am due to leave tomorrow.'

At tea in the refreshment rooms, Olive discovered she was in the company of a woman of like mind, a woman with a broader view than most of her Cape Town acquaintances. She felt a serene joy at this. Miss Molteno was also unmarried and, she thought, close to her own age. But unlike herself, Miss Molteno had been fortunate to receive a formal education and had graduated from Hughes Hall Teaching College at Cambridge. Elizabeth, or 'Betty' as Miss Molteno preferred to be known among friends, she said, was now working in Port Elizabeth as headmistress of the Collegiate School for Girls. Listening and watching, Olive was captivated by Betty's clear Italian beauty that stood incongruent to her cultured English accent, and she commented on this, saying that she herself had often been taken for an Italian when she lived in London.

Betty said, 'I travelled with my father a lot when I was young. Between Europe and America, he would squeeze in a visit to the country of his birth whenever possible, so I learnt the ways of the Italians.'

'My favourite town in Italy is Alassio, on the Riviera,' said Olive. 'Do you know it? I loved the warmth of its sea and the brilliance of its sun.'

'I'm sure my father took me there, at least somewhere on that magical coast.'

‘If I couldn’t die in my home country, Alassio would be my next place of choice,’ said Olive. She offered to send Betty a copy of her allegoric story, ‘In a Ruined Chapel’, it was, she said, ‘… a story that unfolded in my mind while sitting on the chapel steps perched at the end of the peninsular.’

Over the course of their conversation, it seemed to Olive that Miss Molteno had reached a happy accommodation with her single life. There was a serene calm about her that would hold her in good stead when tested, Olive felt sure. If pain were to be endured by this woman, then it would most likely manifest in physical rather than mental weakness. Miss Molteno’s work in education had, as Olive suspected as reason for her being in Matjesfontein, indeed taken a toll on her health. She had striven too hard, she said, to raise the awareness of the girls in her care to the importance of their independence, urging them to resist pressures to succumb too readily to marriage, with all its attendant restrictions on a woman’s life. But, if the girls found her words of wisdom difficult to accept, then they should at least be aware of their bodies. She had introduced into the curriculum something unheard of in South African schools—sex education. Some of the parents had taken unkindly to this innovation and had protested in the strongest possible terms to the school’s governors.

These same parents, Miss Molteno said, had also raised concerns about some of the set literature. Olive dare not ask if their reading list included *The Story of an African Farm*. She had suffered many rebukes following its publication, most hurtful coming from her brother, Fred. He told Olive that as a respectable college headmaster of a boys’ school, her book, with its depravities of illicit love and women giving birth out of wedlock, had caused him no end of embarrassment. Moral outrage against her book, it seemed, had even followed her to South Africa. Mary Sauer told her that Mrs Merriman had complained to her sister that any man (here she was referring to Lord Loch apparently) who should give his niece *The Story of an African Farm,* could not have a keen sense of either religion or morality. Olive resisted the temptation to share with Miss Molteno her own experiences of moral condemnation.

Instead, she said. ‘The best work, Betty, has no visible fruit. It grows underground.’

Miss Molteno’s voluminous Italian eyes brightened and she reached across and rested her hand on Olive’s.

‘I am so looking forward to sharing our conversation with Alice, Miss Schreiner.’

‘Is Alice your sister?’

'Alice Greene is my deputy, and my companion. Perhaps you will come and visit us one day?'

Mr Logan called at the cottage to welcome Olive home and to share with her happenings since her departure. He had worked around the clock, he said, to build extensions to the hotel so that new rooms were ready for the influx of visitors expected in the winter. 'Most who arrive have minor respiratory conditions but there is one woman, arrived with her daughter a few days ago, who concerns me,' he said. 'The mother may not make it through the night. She struggles for breath, and she has stopped eating.' Olive was alarmed.

'But the daughter must be exhausted. She has probably had no sleep.'

'I'm not running a sanatorium, I can't be held responsible for deaths that might occur under my roof. I've inquired of the other guests, but there are no medical men among them. I've sent word down the line, asking if Dr Watkins can come.

That evening, she went to the hotel and located the dying woman. The daughter, sitting by her mother's bed had fallen asleep on the woman's sunken belly. The woman's breathing was a loud, deep rattle and she could see the movement of her legs under the sheet, first one up and down, then the other up and down, and the daughter's head being bounced with each rotation. From her days as a nurse probationer in Edinburgh, Olive knew that these involuntary movements were death throes. She closed the door firmly so that her presence in the room would be noticed. The girl jolted her head up, an expression of fright on her forlorn face. She couldn't have been more than fifteen. Putting a finger to her lips, Olive quietly crossed the room. She leant in and whispered, persuading the girl to leave her mother's bedside, to go to the room next door where a bed was made up for her, and to sleep.

Olive sat with the comatose woman all through the night, holding the woman's lifeless hand, her self-imposed duty relieved when the daughter returned to the sick room at four o'clock in the morning. It was the hour of death. The girl sobbed and kissed her mother's forehead and held a hand turned cold. Olive stepped out allowing the daughter her moment of silent vigil. She returned with Mr Logan. The girl, whose red and frightened eyes looked up at them, spoke in a faltering voice. Her mother, she said, wanted to be buried in Cape Town in the family plot. Mr Logan had already taken matters into his own hands and arranged for a coffin to be sent up on the morning train. Olive stayed with the girl throughout the day until the body in its box and the dutiful daughter

were able to board for their final journey home together. Standing on the platform, watching the train pull away, Olive felt intensely the girl's loss as if it were her own mother who had died, and she resolved to travel to Grahamstown in the spring, to see her little mother, her 'Mothie'.

In late May, she received an invitation from the Premier's office, to join Mr Rhodes and other prominent citizens of the Cape Colony for dinner at Groote Schuur on the night of the twentieth of June. The invitation proclaimed it a welcome to the Honourable Lord Randolph Churchill who would shortly be visiting the Cape. She observed that the invitation carried a personal signature. By chance or luck, a new dress arrived for her, postmarked London. It was from Havelock's sister, Louie, a young woman with whom she had established a warm bond during her London years. With some minor alterations, a flounce at the bottom, she thought, and a hitching of the muslin sleeves, it would suit perfectly when she joined the esteemed company. Mary invited Olive to stay at the Sauer's Kenilworth home, but in reply Olive said that she was not nice company when in the middle of her creative writing, 'saying nothing of interest and moaning about the place, it is better that I live alone.' It occurred to her that Mary might be able to find her a small house, though given that most Cape Town houses had at least six rooms, this would be a difficult ask of her friend. Any smaller lodgings, she knew, would be in the noisy part of town and interfere with the quiet she demanded. She booked into Logan's Hotel in the city.

Groote Schuur's renovations were well advanced when she arrived there on the appointed evening. Baker's work on the marbled terrace was complete and ran the full length of the house, capturing the last of a lingering light from a sun already fallen behind Devil's Head. It was where the party of guests were gathered, the few ladies among them looking noticeably uncomfortable in the cool winter breeze. Olive's arrival caused heads to turn in mild curiosity. Rhodes, she saw, was engaged in conversation with a man she took to be Lord Randolph. He glanced up. Sidling into the group, she estimated she was one of about thirty guests gathered on the stoep, and she turned to a tall man standing close by with whom she might make conversation. It was Mr Merriman and his unexpectedly warm greeting comforted her. She had revised her opinion of Merriman. If he had a problem with women asserting their independence, he was not alone, and she had admired

his strong moral stance in the Parliament in support of Native education and enfranchisement. She said how beautiful was the marbled floor.

'Charming, yes,' he said, '…but have you seen the interior of the house, Miss Schreiner?' She thought it best not to mention that she had and shook her head. 'It seems the Premier's preference is for locally crafted fittings in the Dutch style,' he said. 'For myself, I prefer the finer English style.' Here, he lent his head down to hers. 'Between you and me, Miss Schreiner, I think there is no limit to Mr Rhodes' wooing of our Afrikaner colleagues.' Glancing up, she gave him a quizzical smile. To see the house renovations in these terms was original, she had to admit, yet when she considered the replacement of slate for roofing thatch, and the white washing of the internal walls in preference to paper, she thought maybe Merriman was onto something.

Casting her eyes around, she was surprised how few of Rhodes' liberal politician friends were in attendance. The exception was Mr Merriman who, she knew, Rhodes valued as a riding partner. It was said they went together every morning on the mountain. Most surprising of all was the absence of the Governor and Lady Loch. She recognised the leader of the Afrikander Bond Party in the Parliament, Mr Hofmeyr. He was standing across from her, talking with a man she did not know but felt herself curiously attracted to. She asked Merriman did he know the man? 'That is Dr de Toit from Paarl. And you know the other gentleman standing with them?' He scoffed, 'the honorary Afrikaner from Aberdeen'. It was the Scot, James Siverwright, Commissioner for Public Works, who had been voted into Parliament on a Bond ticket where most of the other English parliamentarians sat on the Progressive side of the House. She chuckled at the soubriquet. Looking to the door, she saw Mr Metcalf and Dr Jameson standing at its entrance like ushers. She nodded her greeting. Most of the guests, she would learn through the course of the evening, were associated in some manner with either mining or railways or water. Rhodes rang the dinner bell and congenial chatter died away.

'To all of you gathered here this evening at Groote Schuur, welcome.' His eyes twinkled and she could see he was enjoying his role as host, but he didn't smile; the Premier was not a smiler. He continued.

'It is a great honour that we have amongst us this evening one of Britain's finest politicians. A man of vision and strong will, who saw before any of his own Conservative party, that progressive politics can be embraced, indeed, must be embraced if the Conservative side is to survive.'

As she listened, Olive recalled the debates in Westminster over Gladstone's Democracy Act, and from the Tory benches that sat in opposition, Lord Randolph's support for the bill. She wondered if there wasn't a message in Mr Rhodes' welcome speech for the Afrikander Bond. Rhodes turned to his guest.

'Lord Randolph Churchill, it is with pleasure, Sir, that we welcome you to the Cape Colony.' The honoured guest bowed his head to gentle applause. 'Now, I can see that some of the ladies are shivering beneath their shawls, and I apologise for keeping you here, so let us go into dinner.' Rhodes caught Olive's eye and beckoned her over. In his high pitched yet commanding voice and without introduction, he said, 'Lord Randolph, would you please escort into dinner South Africa's finest novelist, Miss Olive Schreiner.'

She felt everyone's cool eyes upon her. Had Rhodes upset protocol by inviting an unmarried woman to enter first, or were their silent stares as they watched her take Lord Randolph's arm, because she had the attentions of the Colony's leading man?

Metcalf and Jameson busied themselves directing guests to their seats, and when she took her seat it was with a deliberate action that she let her shawl drop to reveal her exposed arms in Louie's pretty dress. It was an action not intended to shock, only to demonstrate her freedom from society's strictures. Rhodes entered last and taking possession of the room, he moved to his place at the head of the table. When the third course of the elaborate meal was consumed, Rhodes invited his Lordship to speak. Standing, and bowing again to his host, Lord Randolph thanked Mr Rhodes for his generous hospitality and said how delighted he was to be in South Africa. It had been his friend, Baron Rothschild, he said, who had requested he go and see the mines at Kimberley and the Wesselton extension. He hoped also to take a tour of the Northern lands, and the Rand. He assured the guests that Baron Rothschild believed one hundred percent in the success of these mining ventures, and was standing ready to extend loans to the Colony to help build the necessary infrastructure.

What began with one spoon banging on the table quickly turned into a raucous as other guests—with the exception of Hofmeyr and de Toit who looked on with quiet amusement—lifted up their spoons and joined in the rapidly ascending beat. The noise created was like nothing Olive had before experienced, and she saw alarm on the faces of some of the ladies. When the noise had quietened, Lord Randolph thanked the company for their welcome and called for a toast. 'To Her Majesty, the Queen!' All stood and raised their glasses: 'the Queen'.

It took her some days to recover from the events of her evening at Groote Schuur. Each time she traced over it in her mind, she felt elated. For Mr Rhodes, she knew, the occasion had been a demonstration to all gathered that his power and influence extended beyond the provincial confines of the Cape Colony. And his honouring of her as an artist and a woman of intelligence meant much. She hadn't seen Lord Randolph again, nor did she expect to, he had left for up country. She hadn't enjoyed sitting next to the man. She thought him rude. When she told him about her meeting with Mr Gladstone and how much she valued her discussions with such a wonderful mind, Lord Randolph had simply turned away.

CHAPTER EIGHT

July 1891

Before she left Cape Town, Olive farewelled her older sister, Ettie, on the *Norham Castle.* Ettie was travelling home to England to marry John Stakesby Lewis whom she had met in Kimberley two years earlier. Stakesby Lewis was a mining engineer and a widower with two sons. He had gone ahead of Ettie to settle his sons with their English grandmother. He had called on Olive when his train stopped at Matjesfontein, and introduced himself. The boys played outside and their father, settled in Olive's armchair, told her his family history. He was born in Grahamstown, he said, was the youngest son of an 1820 pioneer to the Eastern Provence who had arrived with four thousand others from England on the promise of ten acres of land. 'They were poor families, many without work in the home country, and who better to provide a buffer between the encroaching Xhosa tribes and the Cape colonists than England's unwanted?' he said. He told Olive his father, as a young man, had witnessed the massacre of working people at St. Peter's Fields outside Manchester. They had gathered there to protest rule without representation. The protest followed closely on the heels of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo by British soldiers, many of whom had served and returned to a country without work for them. St. Peter's Fields was the year before his father sailed. He said, 'England had no place for him.' There was passion in his voice as he spoke, and Olive saw the inherited pain etched on his face as he told his father's story. She liked that he held as sacred his family's history of struggle, and shone a torch to it with pride. Most of all, she liked that he loved Ettie, and that her sister had found a life companion. Despite his greater age, Stakesby Lewis appeared to Olive fit and in good health.

No young woman herself, Ettie looked nervous as she fiddled with the string holding together the brown paper wrapping.

'Thank you for the books, Olive,' she said. 'When next we meet, I will be a wife, with a husband and two boys to care for.' Olive noticed her sister drop her head shyly as she spoke of it. A heavy, matronly woman, whom Olive had always looked up to, her sister's sudden vulnerability surprised her.

'You have a strong will, Ettie, and maternal care is in your nature. I have felt your motherly affection more than I ever felt it from our own mother and, ask yourself, who stepped in to care for Alice's children?' Sagaciously, she added, 'It's your turn now, Ettie,

to be cared for; accept it graciously because John loves you.' The sisters shed no tears as they stood on the dock with their arms interlocked, watching cargo being swung on board and holding onto their hats against the wind that whipped along the harbour foreshore. They laughed and felt like they were children again and when Ettie turned away and started up the gangway, Olive felt her stomach drop.

At the Adderley Street Railway, she bustled along the platform with a determined set on her face to the station-master's office. Introducing herself, she said that Mr Logan had recommended she speak to him. The stationmaster looked doubtful.

'Well, Miss Schreiner, what you are asking is against regulations, but I'll have a word with the driver and see what can be arranged.'

Pulling away from the town the train began its long climb up the escarpment. The driver was polite but did not seek conversation with her and so she settled for a solitude she rarely found when travelling in the carriages. These were behind her now, as were the sulphurous black fumes that filled those carriages leaving her with a wheezy chest. Heat from the engine room fire was intense, the cabin temperature made tolerable by a cooling wind rushing through the driver's opened window. She looked out at the bush below her and the mountains in the near distance, and as they pulled through the long, vociferous cutting, her thoughts wandered back to Ettie. She had felt so tender towards her older sister, seeing perhaps for the first time, a different side of her nature. Ettie had always been the strong one, or at least so it had seemed to Olive. Ettie had rescued their mother from her sadness when Papa died penniless and found her a place to live, and she had taken in Alice's children. It had always seemed so, that it was Ettie's vocation in life to care for others. Even before Papa had passed, Ettie had assumed his missionary mantle. But Ettie's sermons did not preach the Gospel so much as the evil attendant on the abuse of strong drink. At Kimberley, in the greatest stronghold of liquor traffic in the whole Colony, Ettie had been anointed Worthy Chief Templar of an American temperance movement that spread quickly across the globe.

Her sister had been hard on her for not following the way of the Lord and when, later, she discovered Olive's writing actually challenged religious gospel, Ettie had fumed. But those disagreements were behind them now; their love for each other had won out over personal beliefs. She pictured Ettie opening her gift at the opera house where they had gone for lunch before going to the wharf. She gave her sister two books: Edward Carpenter's 'England's Ideal' for Stakesby Lewis, and for Ettie, John Ruskin's 'Art of

England'. The expression on Ettie's face was conflicted; gratitude mixed with a kind of resistance or armour against kindness, and Olive was reminded how like their mother Ettie really was.

At Matjesfontein, she waited on the platform for the mail to be sorted. The fresh air stilled and the weak sun warmed her face. She watched the starlings hopping about looking for crumbs, she listened to the crunch on gravel from someone's footfall, she heard the thwack thwack of sticks, and looking across the line to the shanty houses of Logan's employees saw children at their games in the clearing. Her eyes moved upwards to the freshly painted scalloped wooden eaves of the station building. How pretty, she thought, this little station of Matjesfontein. She felt an uplifting contentment.

Among her mail, which included letters of praise from readers as far away as Australia for her 'Stray Thoughts on South Africa' essay, recently published in the *Fortnightly Review,* was a letter from WT Stead wrapped up with the most recent edition of his *Review of Reviews.* In the missive, he gushed with high praise for Mr Cecil Rhodes whom he had met again on his recent visit to London. And he shared her belief, he said, in the man's greatness: 'Mr Rhodes seems to enlarge the horizon of the Empire.' For her journalist friend it was an aspirational sentiment, she recognised, that in Stead's mind, as in the minds of many Englishmen, the ascendency of the English-speaking race throughout the globe would bring justice, liberty and peace.

In late August, Mary Sauer visited Olive bringing her small children along. Olive read the children stories and played games with them and they walked together on the veld, picking the first 'kannidoods', Olive explaining to the children that these little paper flowers cannot die, and if they wrapped them, they could carry them home in their luggage. Watching Mary stoop to help the little one, the sun fanning through her ebony hair, Olive thought she had never seen Mary more serenely happy as she seemed now. And with Mary's eldest, a boy, Olive walked the railway line picking up lumps of coal, the steel tracks glinting in the winter sun, the boy racing ahead of her to be the first to spot a stray lump. At the end of the Sauer family's stay, Mary opened up to Olive about her general state of unhappiness in her marriage. She castigated herself for these feelings because, she said, she knew that Mr Sauer loved her dearly, but she felt herself unfulfilled in life and unable to see how she could possibly change her situation. Her frustration was worsened

by her husband's sickness, she said, his melancholia that came in waves, often when she was least expecting it.

'John is a worrier; he worries that he fails to live up to people's expectations. It keeps him awake at night and without sleep his anxiety worsens.'

'It does sound to me, Mary, that you and Mr Sauer need a holiday. Why don't you think about travelling to England? You would have a wonderful time, especially in London, and I can give you contacts, friends of mine who would be delighted to meet you,' said Olive. Mary's face jarred and slowly she shook her head.

'John is an insecure man who needs predictability in his daily routine. I fear that he would not handle well a European tour; he would be wracked with worry for most of it, and he would spoil my own enjoyment, so what is the use?'

Mary shrugged and her eyes slid away to the window through which could be seen the children at their game of hopscotch in the courtyard. It hurt Olive to see Mary's mood shift so suddenly from happy to pitiful and she wondered what she might say to alleviate her friend's pain. Mary swung her head back, as though struck by a new and brilliant thought. She fixed her eyes on Olive's. 'I could travel with you, just the two of us, I mean. I'm sure we would have a splendid time together.' Olive reeled.

'What about the children?' she said.

'My sister is willing to stay three weeks in Cape Town, and the children are welcome to stay for the remaining period with her in Port Elizabeth. I have written to her about the possibility of my going. I would have to return before you, but travelling home alone would not bother me.'

Olive realised this was no thought bubble of Mary's. Her friend had been laying plans to insert herself into her own plans and she felt a touch annoyed, but she dared not show it. More concerning for Olive was how to explain to the dear woman why she could not possibly take her to England. The prospect of having Mary along was as discomforting to her as Mary's feelings were about her husband, not that she thought for a moment that Mary would be morose company. She simply wanted the freedom to visit her English friends when and where she chose, accepting a hospitality that might be difficult for them to give if she had a travelling companion. Millthorpe would be the exception, the desultory attitude of its inhabitants freely welcoming all visitors, though Mary would most likely find the atmosphere at Milthorpe distasteful, and the men, including Edward, a little strange. Her mind wandered. *Won't you come out, Ed'ard, to see this big old earth and sky?* Ed Carpenter had chosen India over South Africa. She looked at Mary with remorse,

and wondered if she hadn't lived too long and too selfishly alone. Her independence and solitude were too important to her to compromise.

'I'm not ready to travel, Mary. The work I want to take home is not finished. I expect it will be another year before I'm free to go.' Mary's flush of enthusiasm dissipated.

'Then, I'll have to go by myself,' she said with indignation, but her voice revealed abandonment.

When Olive saw Mary and the children off on the train that evening, she watched her friend struggling with the pain of rejection, bravely trying to hide it behind an air of cheerfulness. Olive hugged the children, smothering the girls with kisses, and she gripped Mary's hands tightly. Tall and beautiful, yet so unhappy with her lot, she thought, as she looked searchingly into Mary's pained eyes.

Mary's boy leant out the window waving his hat about as their carriage pulled away from the platform, but there was no sign of Mary at the window. Returning to her empty cottage, a sense of wretchedness overwhelmed her, and she crawled into bed, and in a low whisper she recited the passages from the book of Matthew VII. It was a kind of self-flagellation she had learned as a child to ease an insufferable wretchedness for her weakness. Today, she had failed Mary.

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On a fresh spring day when the rains had ceased and the winds had calmed and soft white clouds dotted the azure sky, she readied herself to go for breakfast at the railway restaurant when she saw through her window, a man standing at the gate. Sunlight bounced off his balding head and he was grinning. It was Dr Jameson. She leant out and called to him 'Are you alone?' She saw a movement from behind the pillar, the hat first and then the huge bulk accompanying him, a bulk that always looked more so when Rhodes stood next to Jameson. With his customary Mona Lisa smile, he lifted his hat to her. She asked them to wait while she put on her boots and gathered her hat. Rhodes said he wanted to stretch his legs with a walk on the veld, but Jameson was hungry for his breakfast and so they split up and Olive, ready for her breakfast, fell in with Jameson.

'We're en-route to Mashonaland,' he said, as they crossed to the station. It was a place she had long wanted to go and was curious as to what was taking them there.

'We have an important meeting with King Lobengula. It seems that the pioneers…er, the miners, have been stopped at the Limpopo River by the King's envoys.'

Olive felt an immediate concern for Seymour Fort who, she knew from the last letter received, had taken up the position offered him by Rhodes and joined the pioneer column destined for Mashonaland.

'Are the men safe, Dr Jameson? Do you feel safe with the Matabele?'

'I've met with the King on several occasions. He's a bit of a tricky character, but he would never do us harm. He knows the might of the British, but he'll exercise what power he has while he has it. He's insisting on a meeting with Mr Rhodes. It's about saving face with his council, his Induna.'

Inside the restaurant, Jameson waited for her to seat herself then asked if he might be excused for one moment. He returned clutching his medical bag. Once he had settled himself and they placed their order—Jameson ordering up two breakfasts—she said, 'Do you administer medicines to the natives, Dr Jameson?' He looked startled by her question. With his feline fingers he smoothed his black moustache.

'Only one of their number has any interest in what I carry in my bag, Miss Schreiner, for which I am grateful.' She cocked her head.

'Is it the King?'

Jameson looked around, then lowered his voice,

'A difficult man to do business with, Lobengula, an injection of morphia makes him happy, more agreeable.' Olive was at once intrigued and horrified.

'What is the exchange taking place here, exactly?'

'The Chartered Company's London Board requires that we have our concession in writing.

'And what is the concession?'

'To prospect on Mashona land; there may be gold on the other side of the Limpopo, perhaps even more than on the Rand.'

'And the pioneers? Aren't they looking for land to settle?' Jameson leant in and fixed his saurian eyes on hers.

'Those men are miners. Miners, Miss Schreiner,' he intoned.

It was several nights after Rhodes and Jameson had passed through on their way to Mashonaland, that she woke finding herself standing in the middle of the floor of her room crying and wringing her hands. She realised she had had a terrible nightmare. It was so real to her; she could still see him. Rhodes was walking by with his old felt hat drawn down very low on his head, and an overcoat on with the collar turned up. His head was

sunk low between his shoulders. She ran to him but he did not speak a word, and as he turned the coat back she saw his throat and chest were covered in blood. His face was ghastly pale, like a dead person's. The night throbbed with the steam pistons of the mail train pulling out of the station. It was what had woken her, but her dream was so horrible that when she returned to her bed she lay whimpering until sleep quietened her.

Olive went down for the summer to spend Christmas with Will and his family who had moved into a new house at Pine Grove. The house was close to Groote Schuur and, inevitably, she found herself in the midst of the high social life of the Colony, much of which took place either in the grounds of the Premier's house or the surrounding mountain. There were invitations to summer concerts, picnic outings and parties, but her favourite outing was attending the cricket with Will and her nephew, Billy. She loved Will's three children as much as they loved her. Baby Oliver, she thought, had the spirit of the devil in him. And she seemed to be getting along much better with her sister-in-law, which pleased her. A recent drama in the Schreiner family concerned Olive and Will's eldest sister, Katie. She had been admitted to the Natal Government Asylum in Pietermaritzburg with a diagnosis, 'sane insane', and Will had taken in his niece.

'Maggie won't lift a finger around the house,' said Fan, 'and she seems totally without ambition.'

'She may still be grieving for her mother. It can't be easy for an eighteen-year old to confront the reality of a parent who can no longer manage. You have been very good to her, Fan. If we could find her a placement on one of the Dutch farms, as governess. I'll make enquiries.' A look of relief crossed Fan's face.

'It's not that I don't love your niece, Olive, I too feel for her.' Olive touched her sister-in-law's arm.

She said, 'I'm going with the Sauers and Rose-Inneses for a ride to Hout Bay on Sunday. I'll ask Maggie if she would like to join us. It might jolt her out of herself.'

The final event of the summer season's calendar was the Governor's garden party. It was a good turn-out, a jostle of people bright and eager. The family attended, as did Mr Rhodes and others of the political class. The flag of the Cape Colony hoisted alongside the Union Jack flapped in the late afternoon breeze, and a brass band played melodies of Empire. As she chatted with her companions, Olive kept one eye on the crowd. She thought it a motley collection of people gathered on the grassy quadrangle. All had dressed

for the occasion in their finest, yet there seemed to her a slightly disreputable quality to their appearance. She saw people jostling and pushing to stand next to Lord Loch, and she felt a mild disdain for this unruly behaviour. A man standing a short distance from her was gesticulating and punching his voice into the air. His clothes were rough; his felt hat seemed to sit uneasily on his large head and his beard looked moth-eaten. She wondered if he was a game hunter. He was recounting to his companions, with what she thought obscene bravado, his encounters with natives and she stared coldly at him. His talk grew more raucous and lurid, recalling the trail of native blood and slew that he and his fellow travellers had left behind them as they had made their way down through the dark continent. Olive's own blood boiled. She pushed past her companions and walked up to the man, unleashing on him a venom of anger and disgust. His expression, she saw, was shock then puzzlement, then he turned from her, slinking away with others of his party. The angry spectacle left some of Lord Loch's guests a little bewildered, if not embarrassed. It had also left Olive shaken, and it was Fan who suggested they take their leave.

At Pine Grove, she went to her room and packed her bag. Then she sat on the bed. She felt wretched. She thought of her niece, Maggie, and of Maggie's mother, Katie, and wondered if she wasn't a little bit mad herself, but she pushed the thought away. She had been propelled by a passion for humanity and she wasn't about to make excuses for it. Yet deep down, she knew there were other frustrations and disappointments that had begun to eat away at her and she wondered if it were these discontents that had led to her outburst at the Garden Party. Most of Will and Fan's friends, and even those men of the government, including Mr Rhodes, had shown little interest in her work. They loved her because of the credit she had brought them with her famous novel, but for herself as an artist and for her writing, she found most of her South African acquaintances wanting. Now, she had humiliated herself in the eyes of her friends and family. She missed Seymour Fort, and she missed her English companions. In the privacy of her room, she wrote Havelock a letter. 'Imagine, a whole nation of philistines!' It made sense to her now, when she thought of her loneliness all those years ago when she was too young to understand why she felt like an outsider among her own, and why the only people she liked were the Boers and the Kaffirs.

That evening, she told Fan and Will her intention to return to Matjesfontein. She said she hoped they understood why she felt it necessary to speak against that man, but

was sorry if she had caused them hurt. She thought Fan looked a little unsure, but Will put his arm around her and said she had done right.

CHAPTER NINE

February 1892

The rumours that began in the summer of '92 were irritatingly familiar but they became intolerable when it was said that Olive wanted Rhodes to marry her. His wealth and stature in the Cape Colony and her outspoken nature and, she heard it said, unwomanly behaviour, she believed were the root causes of these rumours. She could not understand why it was socially unacceptable for two single people of the opposite sex to share a friendship without a suggestion of marriage. Why, in London, she and Harry had gone about holding hands and none of their friends found this odd. To Mary Sauer, she said that she would never want to rob a man of his independence and freedom by proposing marriage.

She had never been alone in public with Rhodes, and their picnic outings to Hout Bay during this summer past were always in the company of others. On her occasional visits to Groote Schuur, she had no illusions as to why she was invited; she was entertainment for Rhodes' guests. As a famous author, she knew she held a certain cache for people like Rhodes. She was a social trophy. Even her strolls with the man in his garden or on the mountain, where they sparred over questions of native policy, were walks never undertaken alone. As much as it annoyed her, Jameson was always tagging along. Something Rhodes said on one of these walks remained with her. It was during a particularly heated exchange when she challenged him on his premise that blacks were built differently. 'Their brains are different,' he said. When she flew at him, he backpedalled and protested, 'I do not despise the native, far from it.' She thought of turning to ask Jameson his views on the matter, but then thought better of it. Among other guests and residents at Groote Schuur, Olive had detected envy, even a subdued hostility towards her. Knowing how painfully sensitive she could be about what others thought, she struggled to suppress these feelings. From Matjesfontein, she wrote to Will asking should anyone mention her name and Rhodes in the same breath to him, he might say that she had not seen the man for months, and that beyond her admiration for his genius, they were not friends.

Will's letter in reply coming two days later, carried alarming news. 'Rhodes has been thrown from his horse while out riding with Merriman on the mountain'. Olive felt a frisson pass through her, her terrible dream flooding back in all its horrible detail. She

read on. 'He was a little shaken and bruised but has sustained no serious injury'. In other circumstances, she would have gone to the man's bedside, perhaps taking him a copy of the *Fortnightly Review* so that he could read the published version of her essay on South Africa, but any contact was now impossible. She felt all beauty from the relationship had ceased and that her self-respect demanded that she maintain her distance from him. She sensed a coldness developing in her as though her heart was turning to stone, and she despaired at the memory of those dark London days when all she wanted to do, where she wanted to be, was home in South Africa. It had been a happy return, finding a place to write, making new friends, being welcomed into the bosom of her family in Cape Town, and yet…Olive realised that she now saw things in the country of her birth in a less rosy light, and this saddened her. She reached for her pen and writing paper and poured out her grief to Havelock. Nothing had changed in the minds of her countrymen since she wrote her famous book, she said, her countrymen still held to the same attitudes and seemed not to have moved on at all. They were three hundred years behind the times, with the exception of her brother of course. 'A whole nation of introverts! It was the slow pace of their cattle-like lives as though all the streets were full of sheep and cattle.'

She drew strength from her regular correspondence abroad, with both her publisher and her publicist. William Thomas Stead, she discovered on receiving her Christmas edition of the *Review of Reviews* and reading his accompanying letter, had been communing with the dead. He had become a spiritualist and begun collecting stories of outer body experiences from across the globe. He called his Christmas edition 'Real Ghost Stories', writing a preface and giving examples of his own clairvoyance. His American journalist friend, Julia Ames, died young that year and Stead found himself a medium when writing words on the page that were not his, but Julia's. His fascination with the spiritual world had grown into a serious study of psychography and other psychical phenomena, such as spirit photography. It was in the company of Arthur Conan Doyle that he attended an event that proved beyond doubt 'what the naked eye cannot see'—spirits captured by the modern invention. Olive was sceptical and told him in a letter of reply that she did not like his ghost development. To demonstrate the basis of her scepticism about clairvoyance, she related in her letter to Stead, her dream about Rhodes. Yes, he fell from his horse, but he hadn't died, she said. In a forgiving tone, she told the journalist, 'life hath called us to many different labours.'

In the days and weeks that followed, she tried to open herself to others, at least maintain a persona of contented equilibrium, but she seemed unable to shift a hollowness that had grown within her. She thought about Mary's visit and the emptiness she felt after the little family left. More than she had imagined, she missed the patter of young feet moving in and out of the cottage and the shared affection and touch of the women who loved her. In Matjesfontein, she befriended a young captain who arrived in the hamlet seeking relief for his consumptive chest. His pregnant wife accompanied him. Olive welcomed their company, but it seemed to enlarge her sense of emptiness. She knew she could live alone, and had managed to do so for a very long time, but when she thought deeply about it, she was sure her current unhappy frame of mind was what this aloneness implied. She believed she was destined to remain childless and this saddened her greatly. Marriage seemed to her more and more unlikely, and she grieved for what she knew she would never have.

Her refusal to accept not a single dinner party invitation to Groote Schuur since her summer in Cape Town seemed to have had little effect on Rhodes, for he came looking for her whenever he passed through Matjesfontein on his way up to Kimberley. He spoke to her generously, never asking her to explain. Nor did he mention the incident at the Governor's garden party. She believed at the time that while he most likely saw her remonstrations, he stood at a sufficient distance away from hearing what was said. Something more troubling for Olive had since arisen. She had been reading in the newspaper of a scandal that involved Rhodes' friend, the 'honorary Afrikander' in the Parliament Mr Siverwright, who held the post of Commissioner of Public Works. To her regret, the story implicated Jimmy Logan. Perhaps, she thought indulgently when reading the details of the case, it was simply one Scot looking out for another, but the scandal grew bigger, sucking Mr Rhodes into its vortex. It seemed that Siverwright had failed in his duty to call tenders for the lucrative licence to operate railway station restaurants throughout the Colony. Mr Logan was contracted for the whole, effectively giving him a monopoly. The Premier refused to sack Siverwright, despite calls from the Progressives in the House for him to do so, especially when it was discovered the Commissioner had received a pecuniary benefit. It was a clear-cut case of official corruption, and Olive was greatly disappointed at Rhodes' inaction. She imagined it was Siverwright's party allegiance with the opposition Afrikander Bond party that made Rhodes cautious in acting against him. Rhodes seemed to be intent on straddling both sides of politics.

She heard the knock before she saw him. He had, with propriety, stepped away from the door, allowing her time to consider. She was pleased to see him and her feelings towards the man softened. She saw again his child-like nature, and wondered if he came to her seeking absolution for his wrongdoings. She sometimes wondered if his attraction to her had something of the maternal pull, that he saw in her a mother figure rather than lover. Not that lover ever really seemed to be a possibility. A sex relationship with Mr Rhodes had always been a chimera. Early in their friendship, she was quite afraid of the man and had later learnt, from mouths other than his, that he didn't care for women. He doffed his hat as she came towards him and they stood together at the gate of her cottage. He was on his way to Kimberley, he said, to meet prospective candidates for the upcoming election, and he asked her when would Will be standing for office.

'As you know, Mr Rhodes, Will is enjoying a hard-earned rest in England. I'm sure he will enlighten you about his interest or otherwise when he returns,' she said.

'We want him in the Parliament. His talent would add immeasurably. Perhaps you could encourage him to put his hat in the ring?'

From under his own hat his ice blue eyes, like the precious stones he mined, twinkled. She changed the subject.

'Are you quite recovered from your fall?'

'I heard you had a dream about me.'

Stead! I'm really going to kill him!

'My dreams are my imagination, Mr Rhodes, and should only be of interest if I write about them.'

'And what are you writing, Miss Schreiner?'

'A short story; I have called it 'The Policy in Favour of Protection.' Rhodes looked alarmed and she chuckled. 'No need to worry, my story is about Australia.' He grunted and she saw the hint of a smile cross his lips.

'And what do you say about Australia's protection policy?' he said.

'Nothing. Mine is a story about two types of love, one is parasitic, the other is a love that stands alone and free.'

He gave her a bemused look.

She sent down to Cape Town for typesetting and printing her next 'Stray Thoughts on South Africa' essay she had titled, 'The Boer'. Waking to a copper sky she knew that it would soon be raining so she settled to writing out a story formulated in her mind eighteen

months earlier when first she had arrived in Cape Town from London. It was a story of a literary woman and a political man who meet one last time in her rooms before the woman leaves for India. They sit before her fire and smoke cigarettes. They discuss many things, marriage and what it means to both of them. The discussion is sincere but without emotion. He scoffs a little at her decision to go to India and suggests that she will marry a Buddhist Priest (they both know Buddhist priests don't marry). She suggests he should look for a wife in America because he must marry a woman who understands him and does not seek to suffocate him. The intellectual thrust of their conversation shields the woman's sexual feelings for the man, and when at the door she bids him a final goodbye, she asks him to kiss her.

As the gathering dusk spread a cloak over Matjesfontein, Olive stayed a long time at her desk feeling a catharsis of emotion. It was Karl Pearson she had put at the centre of her story. She had him come to her, and while he sat opposite, she had feasted on him—his fine 'politician's' sable cloth, his kid gloves, his tailored winter coat, his brown curly hair and beautiful face—until it hurt. She could have stayed with him all through the night absorbing him, silently loving him, but she couldn't let that happen in her story because it didn't happen; he had other meetings to go to, other plans. She allowed herself to read what she had written so far. She picked up her pen. *For a moment he looked down at her, then he bent over her…then he looked round, and she was gone. The door had closed noiselessly. For a moment he stood motionless, then he walked to the fireplace and looked down into the fender at a little cigarette end lying there, then he walked quickly back to the door and opened it… He rang the bell violently.* Olive put down her pen leant back and sighed. She closed her eyes to staunch grateful tears. She had delivered Karl her *coup-de-grace.*

That night she dragged her big iron bed out into the sitting room. Stoking the fire and turning down the lamp, she heaved her swollen legs into bed and propped on cushions, she watched the flames dancing across the wall. She wondered if the absence of exercise had caused the swelling. She was still recovering from a bout of influenza that had kept her indoors for weeks. The illness she blamed on Will's farewell kiss before he set off for the home country. He had written from Madeira informing her that he had been quarantined in his cabin for most of the journey due to illness. She thought it curious that on this evening, as her legs now gave her trouble, her chest and head seemed quite clear.

She saw Rhodes again in Matjesfontein. He was returning from the heartland of the Karroo. It was September, and after the wettest winter in recorded meteorological history in the Cape Colony, the Karroo was blooming with colour. An infinite variety of daisy carpeted the veld and the poker flowers of the aloe, red dots on the landscape, like a painter's palette, she thought. Rhodes had been travelling, he said, to meet the electors of Prince Albert. Travelling with him was his colleague, Mr Siverwright—the man who, with tenacity, had hung onto his Commissioner's role and his parliamentary seat. They had little time to talk as Sivewright, on realising Rhodes had slipped the leash, bore down on them to tell Rhodes their train was about to depart. She turned sharply on her heel and went inside her cottage.

In November, she received from Edward Carpenter a book of Francis Adams. She stayed in her big bed all day reading it. Her thoughts drifted to the confused state of her mind in the years spent in England, amid the intellectual swirl of ideas around social and personal improvement. Havelock Ellis was a Hinton devotee. It was not for people like them, Ellis said, to find personal happiness, rather to engage in the nobler task of selfless service to humanity. It was an attractive idea that morphed with her missionary upbringing, until she met Pearson. Karl was strongly opposed to the dead philosopher's theories on nature, spiritualism and love that had so inspired Ellis. To succeed in helping others, one must first address self-need, Pearson argued. She simply wanted to find the right path, that which was closest to her own nature. Eventually, she had found a greater clarity and sympathy with Ed Carpenter's materialistic vision of a socialist ideal. But here, now, reading Adams' book of passionate sympathy with the outcasts of society saddened her. It forced her to reflect on her own society, its preoccupation with money and its exploitation of the natives. She counted the months; it had been three years since her return to the country.

Despite a run down to Cape Town in the last month of the year to see Fan, and Mary Sauer who, in a state of high excitement, announced that her husband had agreed to travel with her to Europe, Olive returned to the hamlet feeling keenly the absence of men in her life. Seymour Fort was in Mashonaland, Will was in England, and Rhodes had proved a great disappointment. Even Havelock's communications slowed to intermittent following his marriage to Edith, a marriage Olive wholeheartedly approved of and celebrated on hearing his news, sending him ten pounds to buy something nice for himself. Yet, she had expressed this single reservation to her old friend, that his marriage would

change their special relationship. She knew she no longer held a monopoly on his affections. The realisation of her absolute aloneness hit her hard. She tried to convey her sadness and despair in a letter of appreciation to Ed for the book he had sent her. 'There is no other class in South Africa. Wealth is the only possible end and aim in life. I thought Africa would make me better but it's been an unremitting downhill all the time.' As her damning assessment tumbled out onto the page, she felt the old depression returning. In seeking comfort, she wrote another letter, this time to Erilda Carwood, accepting a long-standing invitation to spend Christmas at Ganna Hoek where, many years before, she wrote *The Story of an African Farm.*

PART 2

CHAPTER TEN

December 1892

She stood in the doorway of the Convent, her eyes resting on the old lady slumped dozing in her garden chair, her crochet work resting on her lap, and Olive's heart swelled with tenderness. Rebecca Schreiner's plump cheeks and rosy flesh reassured her the Assumptionist sisters were taking good care of her mother. Free of the family's sectarian dogmas, Olive could feel only gladness that her mother had found in her adopted religion a spiritual comfort. When Olive's father died, their extended Wesleyan family had been confounded and outraged at Rebecca's conversion—the Romish church was not to be trusted.

They spent the afternoon discussing news of the Colony over tea and rosti-cake and Olive soon discovered her mother's sharp wit and feistiness was as fearful as ever. Rebecca wanted to know was there truth in the rumour about Olive's relationship with Mr Rhodes; was marriage in the offing? Olive felt herself reddening and told her mother not to listen to such ludicrous rumours. 'We enjoyed a brief friendship, a friendship of the mind only I hasten to add, Mother! Since the Siverwright affair I haven't seen him and have no wish to.' Mention of the scandal sent Rebecca into a tirade and strident defence of Rhodes, blaming others for making his life unbearably difficult. She called in air, paused and pondered.

She said, 'I hope William will join Rhodes in the Parliament.'

An anxiety for her brother she had felt growing inside herself as she watched Will being courted by Mr Rhodes over the previous summer, came back to Olive with force. Clearly, she couldn't share these thoughts with her mother. Rhodes had achieved an almost god-like status with many Cape Colonists, and her Mother's pride in her youngest son Olive did not wish to offend.

'Will has a good life, Mother, an uncomplicated life as a barrister. If he were to enter politics, he may find the pressures of parliamentary life and the need for compromise difficult, especially if his views of what is right were challenged.' The old lady's twisted smile conveyed some distrust in what Olive was saying, and she waved a dismissive hand across her face. Olive changed the subject. She was going to spend Christmas with the

Carwoods, she said, on the farm at Ganna Hoek, 'my first holiday in three years. I'll write you, Mother.'

The Cradock-bound train wended its way through the scraggy ironstone mountains of an ancient caldera, and Olive felt a lump settling in her throat. It was fifteen years since her return to the little town that lay on the other side of the Winterberge Ranges. It was where she had come as a seventeen-year-old to governess on farms in the district. That life came to her in flashing pictures: the first image was on the Fouche's farm, she was taking the letter from Mr Fouche's hand, knowing instinctively the news it contained: her Papa had left this world without saying goodbye. She gazed out of the train window at the bush running by, and her recollections travelled further back to when she had first arrived in Cradock in her very early youth, to be cared for by her elder siblings, Theo and Ettie. Gottlieb Schreiner's income from the missionary society suspended, her Papa could no longer afford to keep his youngest children at home. Theo was teaching at the Cradock boys' school, and he duly enrolled Will where, she remembered, he received a solid preparatory education. Unlike her obedient brother, she stamped her foot and refused to go to the girls' school. A sad smile crossed her face as she caught the image. Ettie had bullied her remorselessly into attending, but domestic skills and needlework were not where she saw her future lie. She had sought refuge and a more liberating education among the wide and varied collection of books found at Cradock's new public library. She had discovered the new spirit abroad in the writings of men like Herbert Spencer and Ralph Waldo Emmerson, and she discovered Goethe, and George Eliot. 'The Mill on the Floss' and its author, to this day remained her most admired story and storyteller. Her musings shifted to the present, and she wondered if she would have time to visit the library and the old house before going to the farm.

Through the carriage window, Olive saw a land greened by winter rain, another month and the grasses would have burned in the summer's heat. Fond memories replaced difficult ones. She thought of Ettie in her kinder moments, brushing her tumbling dark tresses as tenderly as any eighteen-year-old mother could; poor Ettie, to have been burdened with a difficult child. The train's whistle announced its impending arrival jolting her out of her reverie and she slipped her reading material into her carry bag. The train took a wide bend and her breath caught—the town's landmark, the towering steeple of the Dutch Reform Church came into view. Her thoughts went straight to her character, Bertie. Bertie had been caught up in the rivalry between Cradock's religious cliques, the Dutch

Reform protestants and the Wesleyans, where the former held dances and the latter looked on with disapproving eyes. Bertie was Wesleyan but she liked to dance.

The train shunted into the station, the steam pistons sighed, and Olive replaced her hat, gathered up her carry bag and went looking for her valise among the small collection being offloaded at the guard's van. She engaged a porter to carry her bags to a waiting cape cart. A sudden downpour of early summer rain fell in heavy droplets and Olive and her co-passenger looked up at the leaking canvas roof of their conveyance. With an exchange of light-hearted mirth, they each moved sideways. Her gaze caught the old town well as the cart-horses clopped along a now macadamised town square. It was a short ride to the Victoria Hotel and the rain was still falling when she alighted from the cab. Her fellow passenger opened his large umbrella and held it over them both as they made a dash for the entrance.

Next morning, it was young Richard Carwood who came for her. He said he would not have recognised her other than being shown a likeness she had sent his mother.

'And how was I supposed to recognise you, young Richard?' she laughed. 'You were knee high to a grasshopper when last I laid eyes on you.'

On the drive to Ganna Hoek, passing through a familiar landscape of Karroo farming land with their scatterings of sheep and distant homesteads, memories of those days with the Carwoods flooded back. She could almost feel herself that young woman again. She had never expected to find any pleasure in her first vocation and was surprised to discover how much she enjoyed teaching the children. How grown up she felt then, receiving her first pay of two pounds for a month's work. Reaching the turn-off to the farm, she asked Richard to pull up, she wanted to absorb everything around her, to breathe the land and smell the wafting scents of the bush released by the night rain. He happily obliged and the cart jolted to a halt.

Erilda came out to meet them and following closely behind their mother, there they were: the children, all grown up. What fine young specimens, she thought, as she clambered down, the boys with strong arms reaching out to help their former tutor steady herself as she planted her boots on the ground. There was much laughter and gaiety and she studied and admired each of the young people in turn. Erilda had stood back allowing her children the first pleasure and now, coming forward, she held out her arms.

‘De kleine schoolmisses!’ she said. Olive laughed as she embraced her old employer. It was a shock to see the kind and gentle face aged so, yet Erilda’s shy humour had not diminished as she repeated her welcome to Olive.

‘De klein schoolmisses! How privileged we feel to have you here with us for Christmas.’

Olive wasted no time making herself at home. She had to get used to snakes again, for Ganna Hoek was near a water course. Two snakes, one a cobra, were killed near the house in her first week and the boys put them in bottles. The baboons were busy too; she could hear them at night fighting in the trees. The days were hot, the sunlight fierce and clear, and Olive revelled. To have put her writing away, to be satisfied it could wait for her return to Matjesfontein, to give herself permission to read the work of others without a care to her own, simply to enjoy her surroundings and the company of the Carwoods for a full month, was immensely gratifying.

Sitting down to their evening meal, the family linked hands and thanked the Lord for what they were about to receive, and Olive was reminded of her own childhood where prayer was the order of the day. Then, the ten young Carwoods broke into a boisterously happy mood around the huge dining table; the eldest, Richard, periodically scowling at his siblings. Erilda announced that on Saturday, their neighbour, Mr Samuel Cronwright, was expected to pay a visit.

‘It’s an easy ride of an hour; he should be able to join us for morning coffee,’ she said.

Olive was curious about the man who, two years before, had sent her a letter of admiration for her novel. She had not responded. In talking to Erilda about her neighbour, she established that he was indeed a journalist of sorts who wrote the occasional column for the *Midland News* between managing an angora goat and ostrich farm.

‘Born and raised in Grahamstown,’ said Erilda, ‘of English descent.’

Olive heard him arrive, the dogs barked their usual greeting, and she heard him enter through the kitchen door. She allowed the visitor time to exchange greetings and news with the Carwoods. When she entered the room, he was still standing in his top boots, his hat he had removed and placed on the table and he was holding a glass of barley water. Their eyes locked, and he smiled. With his dark and tightly curled head of hair, and his sun-tanned face, he reminded her of Waldo from *An African Farm.* She walked towards him holding out a tentative hand, feeling her eyes open wide, alive to the possibility of a

new friendship. He took her hand and said how very pleased he was finally to make her acquaintance. They fell quickly to conversation. It was clear that 'Cron', as she learnt was the name he answered to, had a political mind. He was no admirer of Mr Rhodes, he said, and was quite scathing of the jobbery that had infected the Colony's government.

'My sentiments exactly, Mr Cronwright! We have slipped to a very low point in South Africa, when corruption is dismissed as just another hiccup in the business of governing,' she said.

The Carwoods listened in to the lively banter about the government in Cape Town, and about Rhodes' courting of the Afrikander Bond, 'in his own interest', said Olive.

'Perhaps in the interest of the Company,' said Cron.

'The Company *is* Rhodes,' said Olive. 'And what are your thoughts of Cape women, Mr Cronwright? Are they ready for the vote would you say?'

'Everyone is ready for the franchise, Miss Schreiner. It is only a matter of time before we will have true universal suffrage in this country.'

'Not if you listen to Mr Rhodes. He doesn't believe that the blacks should have the vote, and will do everything in his power to prevent them entering the Parliament.'

'Well, the native question is a different one to the woman question,' he said. She tilted a questioning head. He did not respond. She thought him constructively perfect, from his head to his straight back and square shoulders, and next to her squat self, he was tall, very. His face, she thought, was regularly handsome, if a little grave.

Erilda served the coffee and the visitor fell to talking to Mr Carwood about farm matters. When they had finished, Olive asked Cronwright if he would like to see where she had formulated in her mind *The Story of an African Farm* all those many years ago. He gave her an enchanted smile that made her skin tingle. They strolled along the black rock layer behind the house where she had once walked, finding inspiration for her writing. They found a ledge on which to rest and she talked and talked and talked some more, surprising even herself at how much she wanted to say to him and share with him. He was doing his best, she thought, to keep a semblance of conversation going but it seemed to Olive, Mr Cronwright couldn't possibly know anything of the outside world, other than what he had learnt from imperial school textbooks, and certainly nothing of the social and political debates of London society.

When she drew breath allowing him to speak, he told her about his aspiration for a university education, but how it had been dashed even before setting foot on the hallowed ground. He was forced into farming when his father's business interest in Grahamstown

collapsed, he said. Well, I know what that feels like, she thought. The more he talked, the closer she came to realising that Mr Cronwright's general knowledge was wider than she had at first imagined. Clearly, he was well read. Like concentric circles, their conversation took them further and further away from where it had begun, and soon she was talking about the organisation of society and the division of labour, and Cronwright was expostulating, holding firm to his own views. Against her arguments — she had quoted Carpenter — he defended capitalist production, even of 'useless luxuries', for the work and livelihood they provided to others, he said. She brought their conversation back to a personal level.

'Mrs Carwood tells me you have a brother living with you at the farm.'

'Yes, Alfred comes over to help now and again.'

'Do you have other brothers?'

'Mortlock; he's the young brother—he's a book-keeper and works for a trading company in Hopetown. And Beatrice is my sister; she's the baby of the family. She's coming down at Christmas to spend a few days with me.'

Cronwright turned to her. She noticed he was frowning. 'Would you like to visit my farm, Miss Schreiner?'

It was a somewhat nervous and stilted dinner table affair at the farm, Krantz Plaats, partly because, it was obvious to Olive, Mr Cronwright had taken much trouble to provide a dinner to impress. The table, she noted, was spread with an oil cloth and they each had a damask napkin. He had given her and Erilda wine glasses, and as far as she could tell, these were the only ones he possessed because the other guests—Cronwright's brother Alfred, a college friend, and an Irish farm hand—drank from tin mugs. The meal consisted of three courses including fowl, roast lamb, potatoes and pudding. Olive had the pleasant thought that the young men at table were treating Mrs Carwood with great respect as the elder in their company, and she, as the guest of honour, felt herself vibrant and admired. The accompaniment of claret with the meal had the effect of helping everyone relax, so that by the time the pudding was served there was story-telling and guarded laughter passing among the guests.

They removed to Cronwright's small sitting room and Olive perched herself on a Madeira chair, tucking one leg under, and resting her forearms on the carved wooden supports. They fell quickly to discussions of philosophy and politics, Olive putting forward her views on topics that were of most interest to her. What began as fair exchange

soon turned into a highly animated contest of ideas. Cronwright seemed quick to challenge her on every point, no doubt bouyed by being in his own territory, she thought. What had begun as conversation soon turned into a jousting match, a monumental battle of wits between the two protagonists, each round accompanied by cheers and egging on from his male companions, and when he denied her rightness, she hammered her fists on the chair arms. This caused raucous laughter from his friends and brought an expression of utter bewilderment to Erilda's face. Cronwright had remained standing, his amusement giving away, at times, to sheer despair. She thought he looked as though he had been shot by a stun gun. Like a pugilist, he began pacing up and down drawing strength for the next round of mental battle with her. Each time he bounced back she delivered him another blow, and she could see his mind ticking over, searching for a lofty retort. She suspected his guests had never seen such a contest of ideas, and when it came time for Erilda and Olive to leave, they all laughed about it, his companions making funny little observations and actions like sweeping the ground in front of her or bowing as she passed through the house. Flushed with the triumph of her wider knowledge and unassailable arguments, Olive left the farm and Cronwright.

On Christmas Eve, she walked to the top of a kopje and took off all her clothes and rolled in a sandy hollow. It was something she had done in her youth, in the same sandy hollow. She giggled at her stupidity, then rolled onto her back and squinted at the horizontal sun. She imagined for a moment the possibility that she could feel as free in a yet to be discovered future, and she had a strange sensation that it was almost within her grasp. She lit a cigarette secreted out of her bedroom. She felt deliriously and inexplicably happy. That evening, after grace and tea with the family, she settled to reading William Morris's 'News from Nowhere' while the others played cards on the floor and Erilda, sitting on the sofa, did battle with a darning needle and a brown woollen sock. Mr Carwood remained, as he most often did, at the kitchen table smoking his pipe, enjoying the solitude and reading an old copy of the *Midland News.* The subdued chatter of the young people at their game caused Olive to pause her reading, and absorb the family scene around her. She was glad to be a part of this big happy family but watching their untroubled faces triggered in her a sadness and regret for her own family.

She saw her siblings scattered as if by some centrifugal force beyond their control, driven apart by nothing other than the singular imperative to survive. Most painful was to think of her eldest sister. Olive had written to Katie in the first month of her return to

South Africa, saying she would pay her a visit at Fraserburg—she never had. Now it was too late. Katie had lived outside Olive's childhood orbit, married with her own child when she was born, and yet she had always loved and trusted her. She believed that Katie, like Alice, had been born a woman in the wrong place at the wrong time. Alice had spent a life lifting her babies from the cradle to the grave, and Katie had always been on the verge of a mental breakdown. She remembered her mother sending pills to her daughter at Fraserburg. What could she have done for them, her big sisters, she wondered? Her life had taken an altogether different path from theirs, a life for which she now felt an extreme gratitude.

Retiring to her room, she tried to push her sad memories away by thinking about these days she was loving being at Ganna Hoek. She would write a letter to Edward, to tell him about all that was happening to her, and she went over in her mind what she would say to him: *The old wild nature here is so wonderful, Ed. I wish you would come and see it. There are big leopards in the bush and everything nice. I like them better than politicians. I'm reading William Morris's book; everyone here is reading it. When I leave, I am going to send the family your books. On Boxing Day we are going with a neighbour of the Carwoods, a young farmer, to climb a nearby mountain. He's a beautiful fellow. He draws me greatly. Something like Waldo but fiercer and stronger. It is my dream that one day he will make a stand in South Africa.*

Olive's visit to Cronwright's farm at Krantz Plaats and what had happened there was so vivid in her mind in the following days that when she thought of the man, she felt a delicious sensation pass from the top of her head to her sternum. She couldn't be sure if it was Cronwright himself that brought about this effect, or whether it had been his preparedness to engage with her in the world's great questions. It occurred to her that neither he nor his friends would ever have met a woman so forthright in her views. In their mental battle at Krantz Plaats, she had seen two sides to Cronwright's nature; innocence and strength. She indulged in the pleasant memory that it must have been how others had seen her on her first outing eight years ago, at the debating clubs of London. Cron was exactly the age now that she was then. The next evening, she wrote him a letter to share these thoughts with him, to say what she liked about him, and how she believed he could go far in taking a stand for his country, but she didn't post it.

Boxing Day arrived along with Mr Cronwright and his sister Beatrice to Ganna Hoek, for the annual climb up the mountain. Olive thought Beatrice very pretty, but the girl seemed

shy and was reluctant to engage with her. However, with the Carwood girls whom she knew well, Beatrice was soon in the bosom of the family, relaxed and enjoying herself. Everyone carried something up the mountain, and when they reached the top Olive was offered a small chair but she chose instead to sit on a rug spread out on a patch of hard, smooth ground. Cronwright sat next to her. Neither appeared to be in the mood for combat; the hot summer sun, the strenuous climb, and the convivial company, did not lend itself to contest. Erilda laid out the picnic and Cron wrestled the tops off bottles of ginger beer, using his bare hands. He stopped and rolled up his sleeves and she glanced at his muscular forearms with their splattering of soft dark hairs. He stood up and poured everyone a drink and the picnic proceeded with mirth, open mouths devouring seasonal treats, and a meditative stillness. As the sun dropped in the sky and the day wilted away, the party gathered up the accoutrements and wandered back down the mountain. Cron carried down a sack of empty bottles, and Olive carried a basket. She also carried in her pocket the letter she had written to him, but courage failed her, even when they stood by the horses alone together as he harnessed them for the return journey to Krantz Plaats.

A silence in the Carwood household that Olive had found unsettling was about Elsie. The girl's name had not once been mentioned, not by her siblings or by her parents, and Olive had felt reticent in broaching the subject. A year before, she had received a heart wrenching letter from Erilda to say the youngest of her children had died. Elsie had not been one of her charges, born when she was in England, but she was grateful to have met the little girl, quite by chance, in Bloemfontein where Elsie had been taken for medical attention. Olive was certain that Erilda had suffered deeply; she had seen in her friend's sad eyes that inner knowledge of loss. With the Christmas celebrations behind them, Erilda spoke for the first time about her daughter.

'I want to show you something; it is a special place where a very dear little person is resting. Will you come with me?'

The gravesite, a mile distant from the homestead stood alone in the sparse landscape. Olive thought it was the most beautiful thing she had seen, decorated with cactus flower, and surrounded by a twisted wrought iron railing. She read the epitaph carved into a slab of pink stone:

'Elsie Carwood 1882-1891. Our beloved daughter and sister'. *Though I walk in the valley of death, I fear not. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

Olive felt humbled—these were the words she had written to Erilda. The old biblical psalm she hoped would bring comfort to the deeply religious woman.

'I am so glad I met Elsie in Bloemfontein,' she said. 'I asked her to take off her hat that I might look well at her. She was so grateful and sweet to me.'

Erilda placed her bony hands on the railing. 'She was a sweet little thing, to all of us.'

Cronwright visited the Carwood's farm every week during Olive's stay, causing Erilda to comment, 'he's been as many times in the last month as he has paid us during the last two years!' Olive chuckled, dismissing Erilda's observation without comment. On the evening before her departure from the farm, she bid her tearful but joyous goodbyes to the Carwoods, telling them she was not returning to Matjesfontein immediately but had chosen to spend a few weeks closer to Cradock, at Thompson's Hotel, in Middelburg. It was a convenient halfway point on the journey and seemed to excite little curiosity from their parents, but she noticed the young Carwoods pass surreptitious glances among themselves at her announcement.

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At Middelburg, with the safety of distance between them, Olive felt able to openly express herself to Cron, which she did in a stream of letters. One of her first letters was to tell him they could not meet again. It was the all too familiar rumours that she had heard, about an impending marriage that had upset her. She wondered if it were Cron's older sister, Louisa, who had put it about in Grahamstown that her brother was courting the famous novelist. Beatrice, she knew, had travelled onto Grahamstown after the Boxing Day picnic, to spend the remainder of the summer holidays with Louisa.

From her first negative missive to him, Olive quickly changed her mind. She would not allow gossip to ruin their friendship and she followed up with letters more tender, and inviting. 'It is curious how like Waldo you are, and the curious feeling I have towards you, that you are part of myself.' She told him about her current work—a 'scientific study' on sex evolution. It was a study, she said, she had been working on for a long time. It had thrown itself into the shape of a story that she had called 'The Buddhist Priest's Wife'. She sent Cron a synopsis, then worried that he may wonder at its ending, like *An African farm*, where her characters attaining after a pure and ideal life, remain unmarried or die. In a panic, she wrote again. 'I do not think the celibate life ideal.' To demonstrate her feelings on the matter, she asked Cron if he would take a photo of himself with his sleeves rolled up, 'showing your arms'. Her mind flashed back to the health and chastity debates she had attended at the Men and Women's Club. She had stood by the

medical view expressed by some of the Club's members, that sexual inactivity injured the general health of women equally as much as it injured the health of men. Not too many of its women members had agreed with her, and this had irritated her. She called them co-conspirators in perpetuating the myth of the innately chaste female. It was now with a sense of shame that she recalled what she had said of her Club sisters to Pearson after the debate: 'They are old maids and man-haters'.

Cronwright delivered the photo in person to her hotel in Middelburg. She was expecting him and was impressed by the smartness of his dress. In a high collared white shirt and tie, she thought he looked very handsome. They sat talking in the sun outside her door a while then she watched with delight as suddenly, and without a word, he unbuttoned his collar throwing it aside, removed his tie, then his waistcoat, and rolled up his sleeves. She thought these actions were very manly, and she liked seeing his bare forearms. She said, 'You've brought me a photo, I think.'

'If you're very good, I'll show it to you at dinner,' he said, with a bashful grin.

They went for a stroll down to the river and Cron asked about her writing.

'I've begun work on a new essay, for my 'Stray Thoughts on South Africa' collection. Did I tell you about that?'

'Yes, you promised to send me a copy from Matjesfontein.'

She slapped her hands on her skirted thighs. 'So, I did,', she said, 'About the Boer. Now, I want to address the native question. It is the real question in this country.' She fell silent as they walked, and glimpsed Cron passing her a sideways glance. She wasn't sure what Cron's position was on the native, though they had both been angered at the flogging death of a black servant by an English farmer in the Eastern Provence the previous winter, and when the farmer was let off on a charge of common assault, Cron had written in the strongest possible terms his objection to the magistrate's ruling to the *Midland News*. They talked around the matter of the restricted franchise that had passed in the last Parliamentary sitting, and as they made their way back to the hotel, she expressed her fears for South Africa should it be divided on racial lines. Thinking it better at this delicate turn in their friendship to reign in her outpouring of emotion that typically accompanied her strong views on any matter, she chose her words carefully. 'Where the franchise is concerned, it is my opinion that no distinction of race or colour should be made between South Africans. To base our national life on distinctions of this kind will, I fear, prove fatal to us.' Cron did not respond.

They met in the dining room at six o'clock. At Ganna Hoek, she had been vague with him about her intended travel to England but now, confident in his affection for her, she announced boldly, even brutally, that she was going abroad next month. Across the candlelight and dinner plates, she saw his face drop.

'I have to renew my connections with the publishing world,' she said. 'Besides, Cron, we need to give ourselves space to see how we feel about each other, whether our feelings will be the same five months from now.'

He looked hurt, and she felt the pulse of emotion between them.

'I know how I feel about you, Olive. Why do you think I'm here?' She reached across and rested her hand on his.

'I want you to do something for me,' she said.

He withdrew his hand but it seemed he was taking care to maintain eye contact. She felt their intensity.

'I want you to write your feelings and hopes, not about me, but about our country and its politics. A friend of mine, a newspaper editor in London, is looking for a South African correspondent, and I think you would be the best person to say it as it is.' She added encouragingly, 'You do have an excellent literary style.'

He allowed a reluctant smile. 'May I write my style to you?'

When she returned to Matjesfontein, she set about packaging up her books. She selected out the ones she wanted to send to Cron, 'to nestle beside your own on your little bookshelf,' she had said to him before he departed Middelburg. She scribbled a note to accompany the books, stressing 'the force' in him to do good and stand by the truth. Most men, she said, lack the force. In writing these words, Olive saw herself as vital, enabling and beloved. With her letter tucked inside, she wrapped the books in cloth and brown paper and carried her parcel across to Mr van Wyk for posting. She ambled slowly back to the cottage and stood a moment in the deserted street. She looked across the veld to her kopje and beyond to the distant horizon where the orange sun was melting into the earth's surface. Her feelings of love for this little hamlet welled inside her. The Karroo light, she believed, was like nowhere else on earth. At the cottage gate, she experienced a sense of weightlessness, not because she was free of her parcel, but because she felt freed of an unrequited longing. That night she wrote in her journal: *I am his,* and a few days later she wrote again, *I have given myself in my thoughts to Cronwright forever, in as far as a woman can give herself to a man.*

It was late March, the days had grown shorter, and new horizons had presented themselves to Olive, but first to England. She booked her passage on the *Hawarden Castle*. She wrote to Havelock announcing her imminent departure from the Cape. She was aware that she hadn't written much to her old friend since his marriage to Edith. She looked forward now to seeing them both, and getting to know Edith. She packed her case and as the darkness drew in the silence of the night and she fell into bed exhausted, she went over its contents in her mind. She felt no sadness at leaving her small cottage, nor in leaving Matjesfontein. With her passage booked, the excitement of going home to England overrode all. She felt confident that the hamlet was a place to which she could always return and be welcomed.

When the *Hawarden Castle* sailed out of the sheltered harbour and into a swollen Atlantic sea, Olive made a final entry in her journal. 'Shall I ever return here?'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

May 1893

The crossing was a difficult one, her asthmatic attacks coming almost nightly, and it was with a sense of relief that she now stood on open deck as the ship manouvered its way into harbour at Southampton dock. A fog had settled over the New Forest that had quite lifted by the time all passengers had assembled for disembarkation. Prickly with excitement at being again on English soil, she was brought a letter by a Union and Castle Line steward who said it arrived at their offices this very morning. It was, as she anticipated, from Havelock; she had spent days imagining their happy reunion on the dock, their linking arms as of old and journeying up to London together, but her enthusiasm was dashed when she read that he and Edith were presently at the cottage in Cornwall. If she would like to travel down they would be delighted to have her stay. She didn't feel she knew Edith well enough to accept the invitation to stay, and decided she would wait for their return to London. Feeling deflated and lonely on the boat train into the city, Olive weighed her options. She checked into Morley's Hotel near Trafalgar Square and sent a telegram to Mrs Walters at Ben Rhydding.

She had first met Minnie Walters in the 'eighties and they had formed a strong bond of like minds, both sympathetic to socialist ideals. Minnie was a translator, of French to English, and had done work for Havelock. She needed this work to survive for she had been widowed young, her husband succumbing to typhoid early in their marriage. On Olive's recommendation, the Men and Women's Club had tried to entice Mrs Walters to their meetings, but she had found the distance between Leeds and London too great and gave up any attempt at belonging to the erstwhile group.

The following morning, Olive boarded the north bound train for Leeds. Her case was light—she was wearing most of its contents for warmth—but the luggage rack was beyond her reach and she stood looking helplessly up when a young man seated by the door of her compartment sprang to his feet and lifted it for her. Stepping over trousered legs and boots, Olive found her allotted seat by the window and settled herself down to rest her head and sleep. Her eyes were barely closed when she heard an exchange between two passengers sitting opposite her. One of them, she had noticed when pushing her way past, had a copy of *The Times* and it was to this that they were now engaged. Their

conversation was subdued, but she heard mention of a new political party and then the name, Keir Hardy. Opening her eyes, she looked across at them wanting to insert herself into the conversation and was surprised at her reticence to speak, and wondered at her shyness. She shifted her gaze to the window but felt that her interest had been noticed. As the train steamed its way through the Midlands she caught the eye of the man whose paper was now folded on his lap. Like her, he had been gazing out the window while his fellow passenger dozed beside him. He responded with a smile. It was an opening.

'I heard you discussing something of interest to me, in your newspaper. May I borrow it?' she said.

He seemed delighted at her request and Olive suspected it was her colonial inflection that he had found intriguing. Her brother, Fred, had tried to knock it out of her when years ago, she had first arrived in England, but she resisted, believing that her accent appealed to the English upper-class ear. It was the attraction of the exotic, transporting them away from their dreary weather to warmer climes.

She folded out the paper. The front page carried an image of Keir Hardy, a man with deep-set eyes and a worried brow. She read the headline: 'Independent Labour Party Launched'. The sliding door of the compartment rattled open. It was the ticket inspector. The young man who had helped her with her case bolted up and leapt outside. The inspector jostled him and she heard a confrontation in the corridor. The man who had lent her the broadsheet caught her eye again and raised his eyebrows as if sharing a private disapproval at the altercation. Olive went back to the front-page story. At the next station stop, through the carriage window she saw the man being frogmarched along the platform by two railway guards, and she felt a twinge in her heart.

It was an exuberant Minnie Walters who met Olive at Bradford station. Minnie was waving a newspaper about. 'Have you heard the news? Isn't it wonderful?' Yes, Olive agreed, it was a great advance for the working class.

'You're wearing gloves, Olive!' said Minnie beguilingly, taking her by the hand. During her years in London, Olive developed a reputation for not wearing gloves; it had been just one little demonstration of her liberated self.

'Not used to this cold, m'dear,' she wheezed. Minnie laughed and wrapped a large blue scarf around Olive's neck.

'Come on, let's get you down to the hydro.'

On the horse bus from Bradford to Ben Rhydding, Minnie said how excited she was for the colliers, that at last they had found a way to represent themselves in the Parliament.

'We have so much to talk about, Minnie. I want to hear everything, to know of my old friends. How is Ed Carpenter, and Eleanor Marx—or should I say "Mrs Aveling"?' She remembered how Mr Aveling had insisted Eleanor adopt his name even though he had no intention of marrying her.

'Poor Eleanor, he went off with a young actress, did you know? He's back now, not too well, apparently. We never cared for him, did we?' said Minnie.

'I was in dread of him. Never had a good feeling about the man, and neither did you. Remember when they came to Yorkshire for a 'honeymoon'? Engels paid for it.'

Olive tucked her arm into Minnie's, the reminiscing making her feel at home again. Minnie said, 'Aveling always had the begging bowl out. We went to their home theatre production of *Ghosts*. Do you remember? We were all into Ibsen then.'

'Eleanor translated Ibsen's play from the German. Language knowledge is such a gift, Minnie, I've never been good at it myself. Did you enjoy the book translation you did for Havelock's series?'

'Letourneau's *Evolution of Marriage?* Yes, I like to keep my hand in with French.'

Entering the village, the bus pulled up outside the hydro hotel.

'Here we are,' said Minnie, standing. Olive gazed at the grand façade of carved stone corbels and stained-glass windows. It was one of those Gothic Revival buildings that could only be found in the old country.

'Don't we have to be guests at the hotel to use the hydro?'

'Change of ownership,' said Minnie. 'It's open to the public now, men and women's access on different days. It's your lucky day, Olive.'

The hotel concierge offered to look after Olive's case. They paid their 2/6d at the entrance, and were led in by a bath-woman who handed them a bath sheet and blanket. Entering the Tepidarium they were bathed in a hot moist air. The encaustic floor tiles radiated heat underfoot as they crossed to their cubical and Olive's gaze was drawn upwards to the coved and vaulted ceiling that had a ring of rose-coloured glass at its centre. She thought it very beautiful. Around the ribbed octagonal building were wooden seats, several cubicles and a shampooing table. Enveloped in the warmth of their cubicle, Olive found the experience deliriously soothing and at once felt the heaviness in her chest

lift. It was the first time she had been warm since leaving the tropical waters of North Africa.

'We must come again tomorrow,' she said, after they had dressed.

'You'll have to wait four days. Women's access is restricted; two days for us, four for men, closed on Sundays.'

'Ach! I'm only here for four nights.' Olive thumped her fist into the palm of her hand and stamped her foot in good temper, but she felt deeply the unfairness for her sex.

When the sun broke through the grey skies the following day, the friends walked on Ilkley moor. Watching the clouds rolling over the wide and undulating green land, the mingling scents of gorse flower and damp moss on the air, Olive stood transfixed, thinking this surely the most beautiful part of England. They picked their way over tussocks and sedge, and she returned to the topic that had exercised both their minds.

'I imagine Eleanor will be pleased with the political advancement of the union movement.'

'She went to the conference as an observer. Aveling was a delegate. I suspect they would like to move the new party towards socialism. Time will tell how successful they might be, but it is working class men that the party seeks to represent, not armchair revolutionaries.' Olive detected cynicism in her friend's tone.

'And is the new Labour Party going to speak for the masses of women working in the Lancashire mills?' she said. The prospect of women ever being granted the vote seemed to Olive, stuck in the realm of a distant ideal.

A fog descended over the moors, and they made a hasty retreat to the comfort of Minnie's house. She stoked the coals and put the kettle on the hob.

'Now, you must tell me about South Africa. How has life treated you out there?' Olive felt unable to talk about latest developments, about love, about Cron. She had never known Minnie's husband but she knew it had broken the woman's heart to lose him, so she talked about the political situation, and about her writer's retreat in the Great Karroo and how she loved it so. Someone she could talk to about romantic love was Ed Carpenter. She was looking forward to seeing her old friend at Millthorpe. While she knew Ed did not think much of the institution of marriage, she wanted to hear his views about love and intimacy. She wrote to Millthorpe saying she had arrived in Yorkshire and would be in Sheffield in two days. A note in reply came from another resident at Millthorpe, George Adams, confirming what Minnie had suspected. Ed was away,

travelling on the Continent. George said she would be welcome to come anytime; she could have Ed's room if she liked. It was another disappointment. She booked her return to London and Eastbourne to see her brother, Fred.

Olive's life in England over the days and weeks that followed revolved around the post; her plans seemed suspended in a bubble that she found unsettling. St Leonards in Eastbourne was the address she had given to Cron, and when she arrived at Fred's house, there were several letters from South Africa waiting for her. They were not the first she had received from him, that was in the Port of Madeira, and it was from Madeira that she had posted him a letter. She had thought this exchange of affectionate expressions in mid-Atlantic very romantic. Now, she read through his mail by date order, the tone of each she noted becoming more intimate, and finally, more urgent. In his most recent letter, Cron proposed marriage. Olive's heart fluttered when she read the words, feeling excitement and anxiety in equal measure at this new development. She began to worry about the wisdom of entering a union to which she was not sure she could do justice. It concerned her, too, that Cron's professed love may be nothing more than an infatuation for the famous writer, perhaps even for her famous novel's character. During their short time together, he had confessed to Olive that reading *The Story of an African Farm* had caused him to fall in love with Lyndall.

Eventually, she found St Leonards too quiet and went up to London to meet with Havelock Ellis who had returned there, and with Havelock's sister, Louie. His wife, Edith, was staying on in Cornwall, his letter said. The prospect of seeing her old friend again had shifted from her initial enthusiasm to one of mixed feelings. Since his marriage to Edith, they had both pulled back from their regular, frank correspondence, though she had felt his was the more reticent. Meeting Cron, however, seemed to have restored some balance in her thinking, so when the old friends came face to face and embraced, it was as though nothing had changed between them, though she noticed he was quick to insert his wife into their conversation.

'Edith wants to know what are your plans and where and when you two can meet,' he said.

She thought Havelock not much changed except that his shock of hair and long beard were now lightly streaked with grey. It accentuated his characteristically bookish appearance, taking it to a level of quiet sophistication, she thought pleasantly. 'Plenty of

time, dear old fellow, you will have to put up with me for a few months yet.' Her asthmatic breath filled the room.

Though he had said she looked exceedingly well, he asked, 'How is the asthma treating you nowadays?'

'It's this cold English weather that's not good for me, Harry.'

'It's not cold!' exclaimed Louie. 'It's summer.' Olive noticed how lightly dressed Louie was, and wondered that she not take cold.

'Well now, if this is summer then I think we should ask Harry to take us for an ice at Buzzard's. Like old times,' said Olive, winking at Havelock.

In the following days, the two friends went about as of old, arm in arm. They visited art galleries and the British Museum, and they went to see a play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, back for a second season at St James Theatre. Louie accompanied them to several events where, together, they went about a happy threesome. Yet Olive could not rid herself of the unsettling feeling in the pit of her stomach, that Cron was waiting on an answer. She had to reach a decision. In Eastbourne, she had kept close about her *amour* to her family, and they had been too polite to mention the stack of letters from a Mr Samuel Cronwright waiting her arrival. Now, in London, she felt the same reluctance to talk about Cron. Havelock Ellis was a man of letters, as she knew his wife to be also, and she couldn't deny that perhaps she was afraid that he might think marrying a farmer was somehow beneath her.

Retiring to her hotel room at the end of the day's outing, her mind went back to Cron. She wanted to write to him, to tell him all that was happening, all the places she was visiting with her old friends, but if she were to write without giving him what he wanted, a response to his question, what would he make of it? The urgency of her situation called out for a confidante she could trust. Ed Carpenter, the only person with whom she now felt able to talk intimately, was still abroad in Italy. Alice Corthorn, her old London flat mate was abroad, researching at the Lister Institute in Paris. The possibility that she might take a ferry to France to see Alice crossed her mind fleetingly. But her enthusiasm for adventures on the Continent seemed to have lost its appeal. Her timing for this visit to the home country had not been good, she was fast discovering. So many of her friends had gone away, even WT Stead was absent in America. There was only one solution, she would find a place to settle and concentrate on her writing. That would give her reason enough to hold her decision in abeyance. She made up her mind to go to Millthorpe, and await Ed's return. George had offered to help her find a small cottage for hire nearby.

Havelock said that Edith was shortly to go herself to Sheffield on a speaking tour, and suggested the women might conceivably meet there. It was an excellent idea, said Olive, and promised she would write to his wife immediately. She left her case in Louie's care, taking just a few warm clothes and her writing materials.

Through the train's window she saw grey stone houses flashing by, catching bursts of daffodil brightening their drabness. Then the country opened out to green fields, woods and copses and she seemed to breathe more easily, feeling less the claustrophobia of the dank cities. Once more alone and with time to reflect, her thoughts turned back to a conversation she had before leaving Cape Town, with Jessie Rose-Innes. 'The life of a writer is a solitary and lonely one' she had told Jessie, 'it is a very terrible thing that our emotional energy lies unused within us'. Olive thought again about Cron and reasoned that if she were to marry him, she would have in her husband a literary companion, someone with whom she could share her talent, they could write together, support each other, like Harry and Edith did.

Her journeying back and forth across the country had worn her down so that by the time she arrived at Millthorpe, she was laid low with asthma. She told George not to trouble himself as Ellis had given her some phials of morphia. But as she struggled for breath, George called for the village doctor who administered a tincture of theophylline, and suggested she start drinking coffee in preference to tea. He confirmed her South African doctor's advice about smoking but, he said, a small cigar was preferable to cigarettes. After he left, Olive rested on Ed's bed and listened to the domestic sounds of George and his wife, Lucy, busy in the kitchen. In the half sitting position, she leant her head back on the mound of cushions. Her eyes slid sideways, and she glanced a pile of unopened mail resting on the small table beside Ed's bed.

The July edition of *The Fortnightly Review* had arrived, had been unwrapped, and was placed under a stack of sealed and postage marked envelopes. Gently, she slid out the *Review* and began flicking through its pages. A name leapt out that caught her breath, 'Professor Karl Pearson'. He had contributed an essay, she saw. Her hands began to tremble and her heart raced, it felt as though he was in the room with her. Olive had studiously avoided going anywhere near University College London, and had dared not ask after him with Havelock. She had learnt from a letter Ed sent to her in Matjesfontein that Pearson was married, but that was all the news she had received. She read the title of his essay: 'Moral Socialism and the Role of the State: A Defence.' Karl, the inimitable

scholar, always constructing his arguments thus, she thought, circumscribing the grounds upon which others might criticise. She smiled at the memory, feeling a warm intimacy. She read the abstract, '…the efficiency of selection is greater and more permanent than the market struggle for survival'. Still pushing the Darwinist line, she mused. She read on, deeper into his essay, and felt a growing unease. It appeared Pearson was making a case for the state to intervene in that selection: to attain a higher social order it would be necessary, his argument implied, for the state to breed out social misfits. She felt repulsion. She put the magazine back on the table, and closed her eyes. She pictured the sunshine, clear skies and fresh air of her native land and suddenly felt the ache of homesickness. In her mind, she wrote a letter to Cron and then she slept.

Next day, George took Olive to the cottage he had hired on her behalf. It was a stone's throw from Millthorpe, which pleased her. It was small but it had a stove with buckets of coal, a bed with two blankets, two chairs and a table upon which a few cups, bowls and plates were stacked. The water closet stood outside the building. George offered to bring linen and cushions. She could do with a pot or two to cook her potatoes, and some utensils, she said, so they strolled back to the house together. The weather had turned warm and she noticed George wearing sandals over his stockinged feet. 'Are they the famous Millthorpe sandals,' she said, gesturing. 'Ed has been promising me a pair. I'm still waiting,' she chuckled.

'Well, that's not good. I'll make you a pair,' he said, measuring her foot size with a practiced eye.

They gathered her required bits and pieces for the cottage into a basket, and she followed George into the workroom attached to the side of the house. At Ed's awl and last, Olive watched George's fingers begin working across the leather.

She said, 'My grandfather was a shoemaker. I didn't know him. He was from a little village in Bavaria called Fellbach.'

'Have you been there yourself?' he asked.

'No. I would like to go, when I've someone to go with.'

'You should ask Ed to go with you. He likes travelling to new places.'

'I've been asking him to come out to South Africa. You should come too, George, see our big blue sky. I have a young friend in the Cape who you would both like very much. He has a farm in the Karroo. I know he would love you.'

'It's out of my reach, Olive, now that I'm a family man, but I shall derive much pleasure to know that my sandals will walk on the desert sands of Africa.'

Edward Carpenter arrived back at Millthorpe in early August. He had with him a young man, also called George. She noted the younger man's heavy brow and deep-set blue eyes, and his attentiveness to Edward. His handshake was effete but he said how pleased he was to meet her. He spoke in the brogue of his Yorkshire countrymen but it was an accentuated speech of the working class. George Merrill, apparently, had been travelling with Ed on the Continent, visiting France and Italy. His bubbling enthusiasm for the art works held in these countries could not be contained. 'The sculptures of Michelangelo, *David,* have you seen this masterpiece Miss Schreiner?' He gestured to Ed. 'He had to pull me away… I could have stayed gazing on that human likeness and beauty for hours.' She noticed Ed having a quiet chuckle to himself.

'Would you like to try some Italian vino, Miss Schreiner? I smuggled back a bottle, or two.' He looked sheepishly at Carpenter who, Olive knew, was a tee-totaller. And so, the evening progressed, eating food from the garden cooked by the other George and Lucy, and drinking red wine, and listening mostly to Merrill holding forth on the wonders of where he had been and what he had seen. While his voluble presence seemed to iritate George Adams, the younger George's exuberance Olive found infectious, and she egged him on to tell her more of his impressions of first discovery. Edward sat smoking his pipe, smiling through his beard indulgently. After a time, he announced he was ready for sleep and Merrill offered to walk Olive to her cottage, insisting this was no trouble to him because it was on his way to Totley station. That night, in the quiet of her rustic two room cottage, she read again Cron's proposal of marriage.

The morning sun poked through the trees casting a dappled pattern along the road she walked. Arriving at Millthorpe, she found Ed outside the house, inspecting his share of the garden that seemed to have been left to grow wild. He was wearing a fedora, picked up in Italy, he said. She thought it suited his handsome face well. Tucked under his arm was a rolled towel. They strolled towards a bubbling stream at the foot of the garden where she knew he liked to wash. With an amused expression, he apologised for the young George's ebullience the previous evening.

'You remember how it was, Olive, when you and I first visited Italy, how overawed we were by its art treasures. I used to think how easily you could pass for a native of that country, with your wild black hair and mesmerising eyes, at least until you spoke.' He glanced down at her and she saw the whiskers creep up his face. She laughed.

‘I tried hard, but never was good at languages. I like George, Ed. I should think he’s about the same age as Cron?’

‘Ah, yes, Cron, the man who wants to marry you. So, you’re going to allow yourselves to become captive to the diabolical law that creeps up behind two lovers and claps its book with a triumphant bang: “there, now you are married and done for, for the rest of your natural lives’’!

The strength of feeling that lay behind his utterance left Olive momentarily speechless.

‘Well, I haven’t made up my mind yet, but the desire to have a child weighs heavily with me in making me willing to marry. Is it wrong to want something so much?’

‘If that’s your reason, you could have married Bob Muirhead. He was quite in love with you.’

‘Oh, no. Bob is too good. If I marry, it will be to someone most removed from our divine Bob. Not a man of fine-drawn feelings and thought, like Bob or Ellis or Pearson, as much as I loved them all. I want to marry a man of action. It is the philistine in me!’ He gave her an ironic smile.

‘Eros is a great leveller. Perhaps love is most noble when opposites are attracted,’ he said. She slipped her arm through his and looked up under the brim of his hat, into eyes, she thought, full of riches and sympathy. They had reached the bathing hole.

‘I suppose you want me to leave you now, so that you can undress?’

‘Only out of respect for your sensitivities, Olive, not mine.’

Olive travelled with George Merrill into Sheffield, the city of his birth, he said, where he still lived. Through the train window she could see the steelworks perched on the surrounding hills belching out black smoke, the sight of which threw her into a spasm of coughing. They exited the station and zigzagged across the street, dodging horses, carriages and cabs to a building where George said she would find a travel agent. She found a chair and they sat down together while she recovered her breath. Her coughing subsided, she began to breathe evenly, telling Merrill she was quite recovered and would make her own way back to Millthorpe when her business was done. Reassured, Merrill left her and she went inside the agent’s office. Her eyes were drawn to wall posters, of the Riviera, and of the great monuments and churches of Florence and Rome. And she saw poster size pictures of dhows bobbing on the Nile. She hesitated, her mind racing around alternative possibilities. Then she booked herself a passage to Cape Town.

Edward Carpenter gave her his blessing and she implored him, as she had done many times in letters sent from Africa, to visit there.

'Come out with me when I go. You can stay at my friend's farm. He's got lots of Kaffirs for you to study, and you won't mind the wild simple life in a mud-floored cabin. You'll like it as much as I like Millthorpe.'

He began moving about the kitchen, picking up their plates, putting away jam and bread and milk. In his reticence to engage with her on this possibility, she felt at a loss. 'Bring George with you, but I warn you Ed, you might lose him out there when he discovers a country rich in gold and diamonds and land for the taking.' Not that she thought for a moment George Merrill would welcome the rugged life. Edward looked at her askance. She flashed him a cheeky smile.

'When my three-volume expose on love in a free society is completed, that will be the time to ask me,' he said.

*

Edith was in her garden brandishing a trowel when Olive arrived at the Haslemere cottage, the heavy perfume of roses catching in her nostrils. Edith stood up.

'Olive, you've come!'

She had travelled down to Surrey to spend a little time with Havelock's wife who, he had informed Olive, was laid low after her exhausing Midlands lecture tour. She had wanted to rest at their Surrey cottage rather than returning to his London flat, he said.

Edith ushered Olive inside, taking off her gardening gloves and flopping in a kitchen chair. Olive sat down opposite her.

'How are you, my dear? Havelock tells me you haven't been at all well.'

'The doctors say I have Langerhans disease and have put me on a strict diet of protein, so I can offer you no cake I'm afraid.'

'Well, I shall be all the better for that. I've been eating nothing but bread at Millthorpe; cooking for one's self takes too much time.' Edith was looking down inspecting her cracked and dirt ingrained nails.'You like gardening?' asked Olive.

'It is one of my few pleasures, and writing of course. It's why I'm here. Harry is happy to stay in London. It's where he prefers to be. He enjoys the cultural and social aspects of the city more than I do.'

'He tells me you have begun work on a novel?' said Olive.

‘I’ve never written a novel before. You were an inspiration, Olive, long before I met you.’

‘Ah, yes, we met at the Fellowship of the New Life, didn’t we? It was Harry you know, who introduced me to that group. Eighteen eighty-four it was, almost ten years ago. I was so happy for him when I learnt that he was to be married to your dear self. I liked you so much.’

From under heavy lids, Edith smiled and Olive saw a little sparkle in her tired eyes.

‘I’m sorry we didn’t have time to talk in Sheffield,’ said Edith. ‘I felt rather bad about it as you had travelled in to meet me.’ Olive had attended Edith’s lecture, and after its delivery their meeting had been too brief. Edith was in the company of a chaperone, a woman who had bustled her away, explaining to Olive that they had to catch an early train next morning for Edith’s speaking engagement in Birmingham the following day.

‘I enjoyed your lecture,’ she said. Edith tilted her head, but when she showed no sign of moving, Olive asked if she might put on the kettle. Edith lifted a lazy arm and pointed to where she would find the tea caddy.

Opening cupboard doors, she said, ‘Edith, may I share an intimacy with you?’ She retrieved the caddy and turned her face to Edith. ‘Your marriage seems to be a very free one, neither of you wanting to crowd out or dominate the other.’

‘It suits us both to live separately. Havelock and I are agreed that without absence love tends to fall into commonplace routine.’

‘And you love each other.’

It was more of a question than a statement, and one that Edith either did not hear or chose not to respond to. Olive waited for the kettle to boil. She was feeling uneasy about raising the matter of her own situation when Edith said, ‘Do you have someone in your life, in South Africa?’ Olive gathered up the cups, placing them on the table.

‘Yes, I do, but he is not like Harry. He has traditional values. He is a farmer, and he wants us to share our life together.’

She filled the teapot and sat down again. She saw on Edith’s face an expression of mild concern but she could not tell if it was disapproval or sympathy.

‘That’s a very big step, Olive, for a woman like you to marry someone like that.’

‘I know, my dear, but life can be so lonely at times.’ Edith was looking at her now as if trying to read her mind, which made Olive feel uncomfortable and she wondered had she been too frank in sharing her dilemma with a woman she did not know well.

Edith said, ‘But won’t you be lonely *intellectually* in his company?’

'I have been lonely intellectually from the moment I began really to *think,* and lonely I will be till death folds around me.'

Edith's warm smile touched Olive. She recognised in Havelock's wife a woman of depth; he would have married none other, yet their living arrangements intrigued her. Feeling bold, she turned the conversation back onto Edith.

'How do you manage the separation? I mean is it with mutual consent, and what if one of you wants to be near and the other does not?'

'That is the tragedy of love,' said Edith.

Olive returned to London to meet with a special young woman she wanted very much to see before she sailed. They had arranged to meet at the National Gallery at noon. From Morley's Hotel she crossed to Trafalgar Square, it was a short walk. She gazed up at Nelson as she passed through the Square, his face was turned white from pigeon droppings and she chuckled to herself. Reaching the foot of the gallery steps, she could see Adela standing at the entrance. Framed by the gallery's Grecian portico, she thought Adela looked like a mythic goddess in her soft white tapered gown that fluttered gently in the early autumn breeze. Adela's wide brimmed hat with its high fashion ornamentation of feathers and flowers, added to the illusion as she hurried down to meet Olive.

'My dear, how splendid you look, and so well,' Olive exclaimed, reaching out. Adela's cheeks flushed and she giggled, triggering a memory of happy days shared in Cape Town.

'Hello, Olive, how lovely it is to see you. Have you caught up with Connie?'

'Yes. She apologises for not being able to join us today but says she may be able to get into London tomorrow before I leave my hotel. I have been spoilt, Adela, so many good people around me, looking after me.'

Over tea and sandwiches in the Gallery café the women talked about how each of them had spent the summer. There was no request from Adela for news of Seymour Fort prompting Olive finally to ask, 'Are you happy, Adela?'

'By that I think you mean, am I recovered in affairs of the heart. Thank you, Olive, I am, but now my cousin has been smitten. Did Connie tell you? I think it must be something in the Cape Town water!'

Olive was surprised to learn this about Lady Constance, the older cousin who together with her mother, Lady Loch's twin sister, had paid her a visit in Matjesfontein during their brief stay in the Cape. The meeting had been a high point for Olive when she

learnt from Constance that her father, a former viceroy of India, had read and spoken rapturously of Olive's *Dreams* book of allegories. They could not have been more unalike, she and Constance, in family background and in manner, and yet a feeling of mutual enchantment had taken a hold between them, at least Olive believed it so.

Adela continued, 'Connie fell in love with Uncle's aide de camp!' With her napkin, she patted sandwich crumbs from her mouth. 'Mind you, she stands a better chance with John Ponsonby who is descended from the Spencers, has the right blood you know.'

Olive detected a sour note and thought perhaps Adela had not completely recovered from her *affaire de coeur.*

'Perhaps it's best I don't say more as you'll be seeing her tomorrow and she can tell you herself,' said Adela.

Adela reached across and gripped Olive's hand. 'And you, Olive, are you looking forward to be going out again? When I was in Cape Town you used to say how much you missed all your friends here in London.'

Olive smiled. 'I want to show you someone,' she said, opening her bag. She passed Adela her small portrait of Cronwright; the young woman studied it closely.

'He's handsome. Who is he?'

'He's a farmer with rough hands and a literary mind and he's the man I think I'm going to marry.'

In her hotel room that evening, she indulged without care in unravelling all that was in her heart and mind, writing twenty-nine pages to Cron. She began light heartedly with the happy news that the shipping company had arranged with an officer on the *Dunnottar Castle* to give her his beautiful deck cabin, while he would go below. She moved to the matter of names. Edith Lees had kept her own name, she said, or rather she had adopted the double-barrelled name of Lees-Ellis. 'If you and I are to marry', she wrote, 'I would like to take your name but as I am known through my books, would you consider taking my name, perhaps joining our two names?' She said she knew her brothers would love to have him take their name. 'You and I are wonderfully alike', she then wrote. She told Cron what she saw as his strengths, and his weaknesses, but she hastened to reassure that he had the *will* to put things right. She laid bare her own weakness. 'I have an absolute absorbing love for things beyond myself. It is the bad part of me, making me lose control under the action of sympathy and do foolish things.' She kept scribbling into the night, page

following page, until her words took hold of a deep anguish; they pleaded, begging Cron's sympathy and help to guide her through her weaknesses.

CHAPTER TWELVE

October 1893

When the *Dunnottar Castle* docked in Cape Town, Olive took to bed at her brother's house. The above deck cabin had proved of little use in saving her from asthmatic distress. To make matters worse, she discovered on her arrival at Pine Grove, things had changed dramatically during the months of her absence. There had been political manoeuvrings in the Cape Parliament, with Mr Rhodes a central player. Under threat from his fellow Progressives over the Siverwright affair, she learnt from Will, Rhodes had pre-empted their strike and sacked his entire cabinet. And as she listened to her brother rattling off names, it seemed to Olive that the Premier had cobbled together an odd assortment of players to form his new ministry. But the worst shock of all was when Will told her that Rhodes had appointed him to the position of Attorney-General. Inevitably, the political men Olive admired and considered her friends had turned against Will. The most outspoken was Mr Merriman who had called him a political neophyte, a gifted advocate but a very poor figure in the Parliament, having neither temper nor tact.

'Your problem, Will, is that you have none of the vices that are almost indispensable to the successful politician. You should be a judge or a colonial governor,' she said, then rushed to reassure him. 'To have people from both sides of politics against you, demonstrates your uprightness.' He gave her an old-fashioned look, but made no attempt to argue with her. She was standing in her dressing gown while Will rested on the sofa. 'Tell me about affairs in the North; the English papers are full of the gallantry of Rhodes and his pioneer force in *pacifying* the natives. I read that Chief Lobengula had been killed.' She began to pace, wringing her hands. 'To lose their chief will destroy the Matabele people,' she said. 'Perhaps that was Rhodes' intention!' She almost shouted this at her brother.

'They were attacked, Olive, those settlers. They had to call a halt to it.'

She stopped and turned. 'How many settlers died and how many Matabele? It would have been grossly disproportionate. Why didn't the Colonial Office allow Sir Henry to govern affairs there? To let the Chartered Company run things is a disgrace. We should be a more just and justly governed people.' Will shrugged his shoulders, turning out the palms of his big hands.

'London didn't want the responsibility.'

Olive looked beseechingly at her brother, but it was no use, she knew his position on the natives. In her despair, she wrote to Cron. She told him how she felt about political matters, her brother's involvement with Rhodes, and how politics made her sick at the stomach. She was still in bed, she said, but would be travelling to Middelburg at the end of the month. She finished her letter: 'Nothing will ever divide us, absence nor separation, not even death, I think.'

They met down by the river where they had parted. She had been away from him for seven months, and yet it felt like time had stood still, a momentary lapse. She noted his smart dress, and wondered how long it would be before he was stripping away his collar and tie. As he approached her his brow furrowed but she saw in his smiling eyes a happy relief. He held out his arms and as their bodies met and she rested her chin on his chest, and looked up into his strong face, she thought what a strange influence he had on her, that all her ragged care could evaporate so utterly in his presence.

'Are you feeling better?' he said.

'Being back in the Karroo, and with you, how could I not?' He smiled and she felt the tension in him relax.

They had booked rooms at Thompson's Hotel, a two-story premise with a balcony running the full length. She was allocated a room directly above Cron's. After dinner when they said goodnight and she returned to her room, she listened for sounds of him moving about beneath her. She heard his footsteps, the wardrobe door creaking on its hinge, and imagined him undressing. She heard the clang of the water jug being lifted and replaced to the marble wash-stand. She could visualise him stripped to the waist, washing himself. She sat on her bed and almost cried. She wanted more than anything now to be held in his embrace. She lay down on the bed and her thoughts turned to their planned train journey tomorrow. She was going to see a specialist doctor in Grahamstown, to establish whether she was physically fit for childbearing. Though she said it was not necessary, Cron had insisted that he would stay with her to see that she was properly settled in a hotel there before returning to the farm. There was more to this examination than being deemed physically fit; there were other concerns of a medical nature she wanted answered, that she did not discuss with him.

As she listened to Cron moving about below, she felt an overwhelming urge to share with him her wicked past. She would not tell him everything, but how to tell him in the least painful way exercised her mind. She bounced up, found a sheet of paper and sat at

the table with her pen and ink. Could he imagine, she wondered, what she had looked like when she was seventeen? She was very beautiful; people told her so, especially men. She wanted Cron to know about the man who had taken advantage of her beauty and her youth, who had 'despoiled' her, her mother would have called it had she known of the affair. She struggled to find the right words, the best phrase, that would convey her vulnerability and powerlessness in the matter. He was a man much older than she, someone to whom she was greatly attracted. It had happened at the house of the man's sister where she had gone for a short stay, to help the woman recover from typhoid fever. His family were known to her parents, she would explain, but she would not mention his name. He had planned his seduction, she would say; he was very charming, and she was weak, only seventeen, and had fallen hopelessly for his affections. As she thought through her letter, she recalled with sickening embarrassment, the fur coat that Gau's sister had lent her so that she could stay warm; it was a cold winter, snow had fallen outside. The coat had become soiled and she was too ashamed to return it and had destroyed it. He had asked her to marry him but he had failed her and when she returned to her parent's house, it was she who had finally ended the affair. She would assure Cron he didn't know the man and, in any event, he now lived in England.

Before writing out her confession, she hesitated. She thought about how Cron would receive her admission, and she interrogated herself as to why she felt the need to tell him. Was it a test she was setting him, to better judge the man's character. Perhaps, she thought, she simply wanted him to know she was not a virgin. She was, after all, eight years older than he, and had lived a life that had not always been a chaste one. Or did her desire to reveal to him her sexually passionate self suggest something more primitive, like the stirring she could feel in her groin as she listened to him moving about in his room, imagining his naked, masculine strength. She placed the pen nib on the paper and wrote out her confession. Arriving at the final paragraph, she thought long about the words. 'If you cannot forgive me truly and accept my weakness, then I will accept that we must part, but to me you will always be a great, good man. You have loved me more than I deserve. Goodbye beautiful one.'

Next morning at breakfast, it was with a sense of unease that she handed Cron her letter. She was already seated when he entered the dining room. He looked about and finding her at a corner table, his clean fresh face creased into a broad smile, and her heart sank. He strode over. 'Have you ordered your breakfast?'

‘Not yet.’ Cron summoned the waiter and took his own chair.

‘Oats or eggs?’ he said, looking across at her.

‘Pancakes, I think, with apple.’

The waiter brought a coffee pot to the table and they placed their orders.

‘Cron,’ she said as she watched him lift the pot and pour the steaming beverage into their cups, ‘I have written you a letter.’ He glanced up, an expression of bemusement on his face. She withdrew the envelope from her lap and placed it on the table, half way between them as if hedging should she change her mind and want to withdraw it. He glanced at the envelope and then steadied his eyes on her.

‘It’s not a Dear John letter is it?’ he said, hesitating before reaching for the envelope.

She laughed uneasily.

‘Nothing of the sort, I want you to know some things about me, that’s all.’ Hastily she added, ‘You needn’t read it immediately.’

‘Am I to understand these are things you might find difficult to talk about?’

She saw him blush and hoped she had not embarrassed him.

‘We can talk, once you have read the letter.’

At noon, they left Middelburg. Waiting in the hotel lobby for their conveyance to the station, Olive found Cron’s behaviour towards her perplexing. His attentiveness suggested he had not read her confession letter. Settled on the train, the thought occurred to her that Cron might have secrets of his own that he was less willing to share. Rattling through a countryside flushed green from the winter rains, they talked about her visit to the Grahamstown doctor. She was anxious that if she were to have a child, she said, that her asthma not be something she could pass on. She dropped her guard. She was anxious too, on her own account, she said, that she was fit enough to bear a child. The prospect of children seemed very appealing to Cron.

‘I could do with another pair of hands about the place,’ he quipped.

‘And if we have a little girl?’

‘She would be equally adored, especially if she behaved like a boy.’

They laughed and Cron folded her hand into his. He seemed so blissfully relaxed, she was convinced he had not read her letter, and in the happiness of the moment, immediately she regretted writing it.

Inevitably, their conversation circled around Cape politics, and she told him how concerned she was for Will.

He said, 'I understand him, Olive, and I respect his decision to stand with the Afrikander Bond in the Parliament. He may achieve more working from inside that Party than battling it from the outside.' During her absence abroad, she had learnt that Cron had called on her brother in Cape Town, seeking not so much his permission as his approval of a marriage proposal to his sister. She discovered he had also taken the initiative to visit the Grahamstown Convent, and introduce himself to Rebecca Schreiner. They had got along famously, he told Olive, and he was full of admiration for the woman's intelligence. On hearing this, she thought it fortuitous that she had written to her mother before she left for England, to warn her of a possible visit from Mr Samuel Cronwright.

The train stopped at the Halesowen siding to collect mail and load goods and Cron got down onto the platform to stretch his legs. Halesowen was just three miles from the Krantz Plaats farm, but he refused even to discuss her suggestion that he might leave the train here to save himself a return journey next day. He repeated it was his intention to see her settled in Grahamstown. Olive stayed inside the train and looked through the window, watching him walk at a brisk pace up and down the short platform. Each time he passed her, she gave him a little wave that he returned with a grin and slight lift of the hand. She saw he had left his jacket on the seat beside her, and as he passed by her window she began searching through his pockets for the fateful confession. She felt like a common thief and was ashamed by her action, especially as she was unable to find the letter. She realized she had no choice but to stay calm and try to enjoy this journey as much as Cron seemed to be enjoying her company.

At the Railway hotel in Grahamstown, she checked in for a four-night stay, and Cron booked an overnight room for himself. After supper and before they retired to their rooms, she said she would like him to wake her in the morning. He looked doubtful, the train was departing early, he said, and he would rather she kept sleeping, but at Olive's insistence, he conceded to her request. Outside her door, he lingered and they talked some more. When he gave her a parting kiss, she looked searchingly into his dark eyes. *'A demain',* she said. When she awoke next morning and looked at her watch, she found that Cron's train had departed an hour ago. A sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach turned her off her breakfast.

Dr Saunders asked Olive questions about her gynaecological condition, had she born a child, had she ever tried to fall pregnant. Olive was surprised at his frankness for he knew she was unwed yet she understood that as a mature woman, in the doctor's mind, both scenarios were possible. She was not a virgin she told him, and his face remained expressionless as he opened his gynaecological book to a diagram of female internal anatomy. She had herself, she said, wanted to study medicine but her asthma had prevented it.

'Is there a possibility, doctor, of asthma transference from a mother to a child?'

'The notion is quite without foundation, Miss Schreiner, so you can put that out of your mind. Now…' he said, picking up a pencil end and pointing to the reproductive organs in the diagram. His fingers were long and slender, and his nails, she noticed, as clean as driven snow. He said, 'I need to examine your womb, but this will mean putting you under chloroform for an hour or so.'

'Oh, I've never been sedated with chloroform. Might it trigger an asthma attack?'

Again, she was reassured, there was no evidence of chloroform causing asthma.

Regaining consciousness, she experienced a wonderfully light feeling in her head as though she had woken from a deep and restful sleep. She could see the medical team of three standing a little way off, their heads together. Alerted to her recovery, Dr Saunders swung on his heel and approached. He lifted her arm and felt her pulse and looked at her eyes and asked how was she feeling.

He said, 'Have you ever fallen from a horse, Miss Schreiner? I ask because your womb was badly twisted. The good news is that we have straightened it out and made you into a new woman.' Olive did wonder, and was surprised when he said that he found it difficult to imagine how she had been able to get about so much with the womb as it was, doubled back on itself. 'But for now, you must rest completely. You have undergone a serious procedure and you must confine yourself to your bed for two weeks.'

Olive extended her stay at the hotel, and wrote letters to her mother and to Cron. The housemaid came to her room with a letter for her, apologising that the desk clerk had overlooked passing it on. She felt a sudden repulsion, imagining the worst—Cron had read her confession, and left a written response at the desk on his way out in the early hours. 'Leave it there, on the side table,' she instructed, handing the maid the two she had just sealed for forwarding. Once alone, she turned the envelope over and immediately recognised the handwriting. It was not Cron's but her mother's and she felt the sudden

pull of a parent's unconditional love. Rebecca's letter, however, was anything but loving, torn through with spite and vitriol—not against Olive but against her brother, Theo, and her sister, Ettie. Theo, the old woman railed, was a wicked and unnatural son who never wrote to her, and Ettie, she said, was an unsympathetic daughter. In the frantically busy days before Olive left for England, she had written to her mother and enclosed letters to her siblings, to be forwarded on by Rebecca. Now, reading the unsteady hand of a bitter old lady, Olive realised her own foolishness in this hurried act. In these letters, she had expressed a deep affection for her siblings. Absorbed in her own jealously, her mother had failed completely to acknowledge in her letter to Olive, her daughter's presence in town. She placed the letter on the bedside table and rolled away in emotional agony. She felt something move in her belly and rolled back again to lie flat and stare at the ceiling.

By arrangement, meals and letters were brought to her room. The next she received was from Edward Carpenter. Before she left Millthorpe, she had urged Ed to visit a heart specialist. He was suffering, he said, from what had been described to him by a local doctor as 'arrythmia of the heart'. She was much alarmed. She didn't want to lose her dear friend, neither did she want the reading public to lose the benefit of his great mind; especially now as he was in the middle of a huge work—his trilogy on free love. His letter, redirected from Halesowen, carried the good news that after a thorough check at a specialist clinic on Harley Street, his heart was found to be sound, that the periodic flutters he experienced were not unusual, especially among men of his age who smoked. He wrote that he was not about to give up his pipe for any man, least of all a Harley Street surgeon. She smiled sadly at her English friend's stubborness. While she welcomed Ed's joyous news, her heart was in the pit of her stomach. In forwarding on her English mail, Cron had not included a letter of his own. She wished Ed was with her now, and sought comfort in replying to him immediately. She told him about her own medical procedure; and when she was well, she said, she was going to work again like long ago, adopt some children and live life anew. 'I don't think I shall marry, EC, though Cron grows more beautiful, and sweet, but marriage is a terribly complicated problem.' She had begun, painfully, to imagine life without her betrothed.

By the third day, Olive felt strong enough to sit in an armchair and to move about her room. She unpacked a book that Havelock had given her in London—Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata.* He had said she would find in the novel all her own views. She felt an antipathy to Tolstoy for she thought he didn't understand perfect love, where there is an absolute sympathy between a man and a woman. She had read enough about the Russian

novelist to know that in his youth he was a libertine. She believed he had sullied sex feeling in himself, and this showed in his attitude to women. She tried to stay focussed on her reading but each time she heard a footfall pass by her door, she held her breath, hoping that it was the maid bringing her news from Cron. As each day passed without word, she became increasingly alarmed until, on the seventh day of her convalescence, she went with a message to the front desk requesting the clerk send a wire to Mr Cronwright at Halesowen post office.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

December 1893

Richard Carwood met the train at Mortimer station. Cron helped her down and was brief in his greeting to his neighbour, and in his farewell to Olive for he had but a few minutes before reboarding to continue on to Halesowen. She thanked him for coming for her, said she would rest a few days at the Carwoods before visiting him at Kranz Plaats.

'You must do it in your own time, when you are feeling better,' he said flatly. She felt a stab in her heart. It was as though he was punishing her with emotional distance. He had been unusually quiet, she thought, on the journey up from Grahamstown, distracted even. She longed to read his mind and wished, too, that she had had the courage to ask him what he was thinking. He held her hand throughout the journey, yet she couldn't help feel that it was by someone wounded.

Erilda Carwood looked anxious when Olive and Richard arrived at Ganna Hoek, and she sought to reassure her friend that she was perfectly fine and was simply following doctor's orders to confine herself to bed for a fortnight. Erilda said her bed was made up and if there was anything she needed, she was to ring the small bell placed on her bedside table. They had moved a commode into her bedroom, she said, and she was not to worry about a thing. Olive asked Erilda if they could sit for a while together.

'I haven't seen a soul for more than a week,' she said

'Not even your mother?' said Erilda.

'I received a letter from her sent to my hotel, but she didn't visit me, and I couldn't go to her.'

'Oh, I'm sorry. She is getting on in years now.'

Olive wondered in that remark if Erilda thought her remiss for not attending on Rebecca. To cover, she stressed her own trauma, how she had undergone an operation under chloroform, how they had found her womb brutally twisted out of shape, and how Dr Saunders thought she might have fallen from a horse. Erilda looked pained and Olive attempted some levity.

'Well, I don't believe I ever have, unless I was knocked unconscious and can't remember!' she chortled. Erilda's face remained solemn.

'Do you think you will be able to bear a child?' she said.

‘No reason why I cannot apparently. The womb is quite in its right place now. When I am able, I intend to travel to Kimberley to seek a second opinion from Ettie’s doctor.’ Olive hadn’t seen her sister since her marriage to Stakesby-Lewis and now she wanted more than anything Ettie’s blessing to her own.

Erilda said, ‘I will pray for you and Cron, Olive. You both deserve a life enriched by children.’

Again, she found Erilda’s tone unsettling, as though she were judging her deficient in some way, but she reminded herself that Erilda was of a different generation, older than her by thirteen years, and a deeply religious woman. She recalled how when governessing, she had unwittingly declared herself a free thinker to Erilda’s children, and the pain it had caused their mother. Erilda Carwood, she thought, fitted well Tolstoy’s ideal of the pure girl whose only desire is to bear children.

In the privacy of her room she wrote a pleading letter to Cron. She said she wanted his forgiveness for her wickedness, that she knew she had hurt him worse than physically; she had hurt him morally. She begged that he not love her until he felt able to forgive her. She asked why had God let her love him so, if she was not good and beautiful enough to win his whole heart. She concluded her letter with contrition. ‘Your Olive was so weak and she is so ashamed.’

On the twenty-sixth day of December, Erilda drove Olive to Cron’s farm, and they stayed the night. The annual picnic on the mountain scheduled for that day had been postponed because of Olive’s convalescence. No one thought it right that she should attempt the climb and though she protested that the others should go, the young people said it wouldn’t be any fun without Miss Schreiner. Before setting out on the three-mile journey to Kranz Plaats, Erilda gave Olive some long bandages and suggested she wind these around her stomach for support. She complied with Erilda’s request though she had never felt better, quite the new woman as Dr Saunders had promised. Even Cron seemed at pains to treat her as an invalid when their cart pulled up at the farm. He had a chair waiting for her to sit in under the shade of the Cape Mytle tree while his servant prepared them a meal of bread and broth and junket, the sort of food her mother would make when anyone in the family was ill. She found it amusing, dissembling her true emotion with expressions of gratitude.

In the company of Erilda, it was impossible for her to speak openly to Cron. Perhaps it was difficult for him, too, she thought, and was comforted when she glimpsed him looking at her with that old wonderous expression when she uttered her thoughts on

topics of conversation. When she retired to the room he had allocated her—next to his—she felt a blissful happiness at their being separated by nothing more than a papery wall. The division she had put between them in her written confession at Middelburg, seemed so very small and unimportant now, and as she lay her head on the pillow, she felt this little house was more home to her than any place on earth.

At the end of her fortnight at the Carwoods, Olive returned to Middelburg and awaited Cron's promised arrival in the New Year. If he could clear it with his overseer, he said, he hoped to spend a week with her. Waiting for her at Thompson's Hotel was a parcel from Millthorpe. It contained a pair of sandals. To her relief, this pair made by EC—his initials scribbled into the sole—fitted her better than George Adams' sandals, and she began to wear them every day. People stopped and asked her about her footwear and when she said they were made in England, they asked were they fashionable there, and did everyone wear them? This amused her, especially as she observed the questioner invariably waited for her answer before committing to an opinion.

Cron arrived on the first day of January. He embraced her but he did not kiss her. Wanting to feel his warmth, she moved her body as close to him as she could with decency. Cron ordered up a small bottle of French champagne to enjoy with their dinner. It was after all, he proudly announced, a new year with new beginnings to look forward to. Other of the hotel's diners were in a party mood, and she knew it was not the time or place to enter into serious conversation, especially when the aperitif induced in her a sense of happy irresponsibility. They talked about the farm and he told her about his Afrikaner overseer he had entrusted to manage it during his absence. She wanted to take Cron shopping, she said, perhaps they could find something nice to buy each other as a wedding gift.

They had yet to decide a date for the ceremony, if it was going to happen at all. Cron had not responded to her confessional letter in words or in writing, and if he did not she resolved she must force it out of him. One way or another, the matter needed to be settled between them. Before going to their separate rooms, Cron kissed her goodnight. It was a kiss that lingered and she had for the first time since Grahamstown, a sense that he might have forgiven her. They agreed to meet early next morning for a walk to the river before the sun was high. In bed she was restless, turning over in her mind what she would say to him, how she would brooch the matter of her shameful affair, and how she would

plead with him to be honest with her, to tell her how her revelations had affected him, had they changed his attitude to her, was his love for her diminished?

She woke before dawn, brushing and folding her hair into the neat bun that she liked to wear on the top of her head. She splashed her face with water, and put on her grey serge dress and Ed's sandals. Carrying her sun hat, she stepped outside closing the door behind. When she turned, she saw Cron sitting on the edge of the well. His white flannelled legs were flopped over one another, and his arms were folded. He was smiling at her, a little cheekily, she thought. The dry bracken and twigs cracked under their feet as they made their way to the river. The morning sun was a bright orange ball poking its head above the horizon, its rays casting purple shadows on the distant mountains. She felt sublime as Cron wrapped his arm around her giving her a squeeze, then took her hand to lead her. At the water's edge, they sat on a fallen log. The water flow had slowed since they were last here, the river quite dried up in parts. They saw pipes coming out of the river and disappearing into the muddy banks on the other side.

'Do you like freshwater fish?' he said.

'I don't believe I've ever eaten it.'

'They come down the river at Kranz Plaats. Best time to net them is after the winter rain. I'll get some for us next season.'

They sat silent for a while enjoying the cool wisps of breeze floating up from the pools of water below them, then Olive spoke. She wanted to talk about the letter she had written him, she said, about what had happened to her in her youth. Cron was resting his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped together and he appeared to be gazing across the river to plots of cultivated land on the other side. His frown, she noticed, as he turned to her had reappeared.

She said, 'I have told you it all because I believed it was right for you to know.' He straightened and nodded thoughtfully and then he said,

'I have read and reread your letters and I find them puzzling, even contradictory.' Olive was surprised at this and she tilted a quizzical head.

He said, 'Reading between the lines, I sense that you are not sure about marriage, or about me, perhaps?'

She gulped, holding back an urge to reassure him that he meant everything to her, that when she had been at her lowest, all she wanted was to be with him. She sensed he had more to say.

'If there is any doubt in your mind, Olive, then I wish that you be honest with me,' he said.

It was a revelation to her that Cron's silence over the past weeks meant something altogether different from what she had thought. It was a salutary lesson that in matters of the heart, to rein in her wild imagination. Perking up, she said,

'Then you have forgiven me?'

'Your life, Olive, and what happened to you twenty years ago is not for me to forgive.' He fumbled for her hand and turned and looked at her squarely.

'Did you see him again, this man, in England?'

'Do you mean on my recent visit, or before?' She was on the point of laughing at the absurdity of his question but checked herself. 'No, I never saw him again, ever. I had no wish to; I forbade it. Separation is the only cure for passion.' She resisted saying how she had written the man out of her life by putting him in a book. It had been her first attempt at novel writing. Her character, Piece of Perfection, had discarded his pregnant mistress who, like Alice Brown in Dicken's *Dombey and Son,* gave birth to a dead child. That was the story *Undine,* the manuscript of which she had left in Havelock Ellis' care.

'And have you loved since?' Cron asked probingly.

'I have loved many people, men and women, for some, like Ellis and Carpenter, I have felt a very great love. But they are men for whom I felt no sex affection. There are men who wanted otherwise but the attraction was not often mutual.' Olive was thinking of Donkin, her English doctor who had pursued her relentlessly with proposals of marriage.

Now it was her turn to look Cron squarely in the face. 'Cron, can you believe me, will you believe me when I say that my life has been a celibate one for twenty years?' She lied. Her years in England, when at the height of her beauty and fame, had been a constant battle with men wanting her body and her soul and she had struggled to suppress her own animal desires. Her mind flashed to the Swede who she met in Alassio. Feeling sore of heart at the time over Karl Pearson, pained by his lack of sympathy for her, the man at the Grand Hotel was big and strong and blonde and he had brought her comfort. He had got her into his bed and when her menstruation was late, she fled to Menton and sent twenty pounds to Havelock begging him to meet her in Paris. Cron had turned his face away, his eyes examining the pipes coming out of the river. That was the least of it, she thought, never would she tell Cron about her sexually perverse encounter with a sadist, whom she had met on the Isle of Wight eight years before the Alassio affair, and who had given her acute pleasure but had left her feeling utterly degraded.

Cron lifted her crunched hand from her lap and pressed it to his lips. Then, as suddenly, he dropped it and bolted up.

'We should return to breakfast before it is cleared away,' he said.

In the following days, they talked about what marriage meant to each of them. Olive wished, she said, that the marriage contract should make them monetarily independent. It was a necessary condition for putting things right. She tried to explain to him her theory that the problem of relations between the sexes was born from the parasitic nature of financially dependent wives. Cron said he respected her views on this matter. When their discussion turned to setting a date for the ceremony, however, she was vague. 'I want to consult Ettie's doctor about my general health,' she said. He looked surprised.

'In Kimberley?'

'Yes. I'll feel happier with a second opinion. I want to see Ettie in any case, before she and Stakesby-Lewis set off for the new territory in the north where he has taken up land.'

'Oh, I didn't know.'

She could see the old doubt creeping back into his face, and in haste, she proposed the last week of February. He withdrew from his waistcoat pocket a small diary and studied the calendar. She could see he was taking back control of a difficult situation, rescuing them both from potential conflict.

'Saturday the twenty-fourth?' He looked at her for approval, and she gave it willingly. She said he was to invite whoever he liked as his witness and she was going to invite her brother, Theo, as hers. It would be a simple ceremony, on that they were both agreed, and in the happy certainty of a date set, Cron left her. When he leant his handsome head of tight dark curls out the window to wave from the shunting train, she felt a rush of tenderness towards him. She went immediately to the ticket office and booked a seat on a train bound for Kimberley, to depart the next day.

Ettie's place was a little outside of the town and when Stakesby-Lewis pulled up the wagon with his passenger, Olive heard a scream come from inside the house. Next, she saw the door flung open and a woman of gross size bail out and lumber towards them. It was the first time the sisters had seen each other in almost two years.

'The house is in quite a tipped-up state, Olive, I'm sorry, but we have made you up a bed,' said Ettie, pulling at Olive to get down from the cart. The boys came out of the

house to help their father with the horse and Ettie shouted something at them then threw her arms around Olive.

'My, haven't they grown,' said Olive peering over Ettie's broad shoulder.

'Lovely boys,' said Ettie. 'Will be a great help to their father on the farm.'

Olive established that the family's journey to their new home was still a week away and she wasn't sure if she could live in a tipped-up house for that long, but she had hoped to undertake part of the journey with them in their wagons, camping along the way. It was the thrill of the trek and her love of camping in the outdoors, perhaps even more than her wish to see Ettie, that had brought her to Kimberley when she first learnt of their imminent departure. She quickly settled in, however, enjoying conversation with her brother-in-law while Ettie, who seemed to be in a state of flux between busyness and exhaustion—momentarily flopping into a chair to regain strength for the next round of heightened activity—spoke in rushed sentences and heard very little of what Olive was saying. John Stakesby-Lewis was nothing like Ettie. He was calm and attentive and it was a disappointment for Olive to see that some of Ettie's highly strung nature seemed to have rubbed off on John's boys as the two of them galloped about the place responding in kind to Ettie's agitated demands and squeals.

Olive and Stakesby-Lewis removed to the front room where, undisturbed, they could compare travel notes on their respective visits to the home country. Ettie had shouted at him to tell Olive about their tour in Italy. His boys had stayed with their English grandmother, he said, allowing himself and Ettie to have a proper honeymoon. He smiled wistfully and Olive thought it probably seemed to him a very long time ago. Olive told him about her visit to Millthorpe and John said that he had enjoyed reading *England's Ideal* that she had given him as a wedding gift.

'Do you think your friend will come out to South Africa?' he asked.

'It's not from want of trying to get Ed out here, but he is so engrossed in his new writing project, I doubt it will be any time soon. I've told him many people would welcome him here, not least of all Cron who seems to love him as much as I do, though they have never met.'

'How is Cronwright?' asked Stakesby-Lewis.

Olive tapped the side of her nose. 'I haven't had a chance to share my news with Ettie so please don't discuss it with her yet, but Cron and I are planning to marry, possibly as early as next month. I'll break the news at dinner, and you can pretend to be hearing it for the first time.'

‘It might be better to wait until the boys have turned in. Ettie doesn’t stop, even at mealtimes,’ he said, smiling indulgently.

The wagons were outspanned at the Taungs camp on the Hart River in British Bechuanaland. They had travelled two long hard days from Kimberley. It was raining at the camp, yet Olive felt healthier and happier than ever she had since she was sixteen, the Kimberley doctor confirming her fit for life. The rain eased and everyone turned out of the wagons to busy themselves; the boys collecting firewood, Stakesby-Lewis setting up the brae, and from the back of the wagon, Ettie opening the food boxes. From the cool-box she took out the remaining sarsartees that she and Olive had prepared before the family left Kimberley. Olive found plates and utensils and a loaf of bread. She passed the bread through the back of the wagon then clambered down with the plates and went behind to join her sister.

‘Do you remember, Ettie, camping out with Papa when we travelled with him as children to the villages?’

‘He was a kind man; I missed him terribly when he died. I feel fortunate to have John: he has filled that gap in my life.’ Ettie looked toward the man bent over the brae under which a fire hissed and spat from damp wood, and Olive watched her pass the sarsartees to John in a silent exchange rich with domestic contentment. She wondered if she would feel that with Cron. Unlike Stakesby-Lewis who was old enough to be Olive’s father, Cron felt more like a brother to her. When Ettie returned to the wagon Olive sensed in her sister a need for more to be said.

‘Mama was never kind to us girls. Perhaps she was to you Olive; you were her baby.’

‘It wasn’t very kind of her to not visit me in Grahamstown. She’s a jealous little woman. I made a mistake in sending you an affectionate letter, through her, before I left for England. To make matters worse, when Cron visited her during my absence he ecstatically proclaimed you one of the most noble and strong characters in the Colony.’

Ettie stopped her preparations, and turned to Olive.

‘How would he know that?’

‘You don’t realise do you Ettie, your reputation for good works precedes you. The lost souls you have saved, the weak, the inebriated; you have changed lives. People know about these things.’

‘Thankyou, Olive. It’s nice to be recognised by my sister if not by my mother.’

They heard a loud shout and Olive looked up to see Stakesby-Lewis wielding a large branch and dancing around the fire. His movements were exaggerated almost cartoonish. In the flickering light of the fire, smaller, shadowy forms darted back and forth. It took her several seconds to realise what Ettie had already grasped: the shadows were chimps, drawn into the camp by the smell of cooking meat.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

February 1894

Cron arranged the ceremony for ten o'clock, to take place at the magistrate's house. Olive spent the first week after her return to Middelburg writing to all her friends, in England and in South Africa, alerting them to her forthcoming marriage to Mr Samuel Cronwright of 'Kranz Plaats' via Halesowen, Cape Colony. Proudly, she told her correspondees that Cronwright was going to take her name, adding it to his own. In her letter to Havelock, she enclosed a photo of herself that Cron had taken in the veld among the bushes. '…quite the best photo I have ever had taken,' she wrote. She sought to reassure her old companion that she loved him still. 'Havelock, thought I may never say it, I shall need your love more than ever; give it me!' In writing out her letter, she recalled how Havelock had proved a great disappointment to her when she had tried to initiate him in the art of love early in their relationship. He seemed to be satisfied with what he called 'sex play' and hadn't wanted to take their physical intimacy any further. At the time, she accepted this for what it was, and they had settled into a platonic love, no less deep, for one another. In Cron's virility, she felt more confident. His sexual competence had shown itself to her during his last visit to Middelburg when they had both fought against desire. She had leant against him one night in the shadowy corner outside her room and felt his penis hard against her. She sensed he might willingly have allowed himself to be smuggled into her room, but wanting to rehabilitate herself in his eyes, she had stayed strong.

Olive received a letter from Cron's mother, conveying her delight at her son's choice of partner, and she received brotherly letters from Will in Cape Town and Fred in England. In Middelburg, people stopped in the street to congratulate her, and wires from her South African friends were arriving at the hotel with increasing frequency. With so many joyus and positive expressions, she began to feel she was doing right in entering this marriage, and she wrote to Cron to tell him so.

Theo arrived the day before the ceremony, and Olive washed her hair. She walked her brother to the river so that he might stretch his legs after his long journey and that her hair might dry in the sun. As the eldest of her two brothers living in the Colony, Theo's expectation for his role in proceedings was that he would be giving her away, but she corrected him and said his role was simply as a witness.

‘We’re not marrying in a church, old boy, we are marrying by special licence. It will be over in minutes. We’re not dressing up either, I’m wearing my old grey dress and Cron is wearing his work clothes.’ Long ago Olive had put aside the ridiculous ordeal of endeavouring to be fashionable, and getting married, she felt, should be no different.

‘Then I shall be a right patsy in my suit, collar and cuffs,’ said Theo, looking somewhat dispirited. Theo had never married and had devoted his life, after teaching and diamond digging, to Temperance and the Wesleyan mission. It had been at Olive’s request that he had travelled over six hundred miles from Cape Town for the ceremony. Now, she feared that the ‘old baas’ might get cross and resentful. She put her arms around his waist, and looked up into his hurt eyes.

‘I’m so glad you came, dear brother. You are like a father to me, Theo, and how lonely I would have been without at least one member of my family present on my special day.’

Cron arrived at the hotel with a farmer friend from Bedford whom Olive had not met, though she had heard often of Mr Charles Webber from Cron. He had supported Cron in establishing the Cradock Farmers Association, and it seemed a firm friendship had grown between them. Mr Webber came to her door and introduced himself to Olive, and to Theo who had remained with her in her room awaiting the arrival of the other party. Webber raised his hat, and with the sun at his back his shock of rust coloured hair glowed. Cron had forewarned Olive his friend was built like a train, six foot tall and solid, he said. Stepping inside her room, Mr Webber ducked his head. He towered over even Theo.

‘Mr Cronwright sends his regards to you, Miss Schreiner, but wishes me to convey to you that he will wait until the morning to see you,’ he said. Theo swung back on his heels, his hands behind his back in a proprietorial gesture.

‘Indeed, as it should be: the groom must not set eyes on his bride until the day of the wedding,’ he said, winking at Olive.

Olive suppressed a dry smile, thinking it a lot of humbug, but not wanting to embarrass either man, she kept this thought to herself. In any event, she would welcome an early turn in. Webber smiled. ‘If it suits everyone, Mr Cronwright suggests we all meet together in the dining room for breakfast.’

‘Admirable,’ said Theo, looking at Olive for approval before picking up his hat and jacket. He kissed her goodnight, then left with Webber to join Cronwright for supper. She closed the door against the warm night air and buzzing insects and took from the wardrobe her dark grey serge dress and inspected it. Then, she wove her thick hair into plaits. The

knowledge of Cron's arrival at the hotel had brought her a beautiful feeling of calm, and she thought it rather romantic of him not to come to her. As she folded her hair up under a night-cap, she knew, deep in her soul, that she had done right in committing herself to him.

Magistrate Roux's house was but a short distance away and the party resolved to walk it. Setting off from Thompson's Hotel, they were keenly watched by the hotel's permanent residents: Miss Gowie giving Olive an affectionate wave, and old Mr Jack seemed to be having a chuckle. Perhaps it was at Theo's morning suit that did seem strangely out of place in this dry Karroo town on a sizzling summer morning. Cron walked ahead with Mr Webber, and Olive and Theo followed. They were married in the drawing room of Roux's house by special licence, with the watchful eyes of their witnesses upon them. When it was done, Cron kissed her and Mr Webber shouted three cheers for the Cronwright-Schreiners. She sat down to sign her name, and felt a frisson pass through her.

Mrs Roux brought in glasses of sherry and apple juice. As the happy party conversed among themselves, Olive caught Cron stealing glances at her. His expression, almost a look of awe, as if he couldn't quite believe she was his. As Cron and Olive had to wait until three in the afternoon for their train to Halesowen, Cron had arranged with the hotel restaurant a special luncheon be prepared for them. Olive announced her wish to return to the hotel in a cape cart, alone. The gentlemen, she said—and here she included her husband—could walk, 'it will help you build your appetites.' Surprise registered on all their faces, and as she bid her goodbyes to the magistrate and his lady wife, she heard Cron quip that his wife was already setting the ground rules.

At two o'clock, their sumptuous lunch concluded, a wagonette was brought up to the hotel. They emerged to a small crowd gathered outside who cheered and threw rice at Olive and Cron, the pellets catching in Olive's netted hat, and in Cron's tight curls. They took it in good humour, waved their farewell, and climbed into the wagon. As the horse started for the railway station, Olive caught Theo's eye among the crowd of well-wishers. She couldn't read his expression but he wasn't smiling. Sowly, he raised his hand to her as though bestowing a patriarch's blessing.

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The dogs ran towards them barking excitedly and Olive tussled their ears. Enveloped by the stillness and warmth of the night air, she gazed up at the star-spangled heavens and let out a huge sigh. Entering the house at Kranz Plaats, she was delighted to find a table set

for them and on it a fowl that had been sent up with a note from Cron's mother. They consumed the fowl with relish, and when they had exhausted themselves raking over the day's happy and amusing events, they retired. The old Hottentot woman who kept house for Cron had made up the double bed with new sheets, pillowslips and a cotton blanket. It was Cron's house but it was Olive's bed, and she found this empowering. The more to think of it as a sacred place where they would explore each other together, share and find marriage's ideal love. A shaft of moonlight through the uncurtained window framed their naked bodies in its glow, and she rested her head on Cron's broad chest of matted hair.

Her married life began with childish pleasures, decorating the house, making new curtains and rearranging their few items of furniture. Cron put up extra shelves for her books when his own small bookcase began to groan under the weight of its added volumes. She found her greatest pleasure was to be outside with her husband, in nature, walking with Daphne, Cron's prize red pointer, to the mimosa trees down at the river, and at dusk, accompanying her husband to herd the Angora goats into their kraals. Wanting to make herself useful, she helped with the counting in. Kraaling, he said, was a necessary part of keeping small stock because of the numbers of jackals about the place. On the farm, Cron also kept dry and milking cows, and he introduced her to his Tembu headmen: Limon in charge of the former, and Stoffel, responsible for the milking. Limon, she thought, a splendid looking fellow with his big chest over which was thrown a red blanket, and on his head, he wore a jackal skin cap. And then there were the ostriches, their feathers a prized export to the capitals of Europe and America. They were, Cron said, the farm's most valuable income source.

The Hottentot woman, whose name was Rose, came into the house to clean up the breakfast things and sweep through. Olive was pleased to have Rose's help because it meant she was free to go with Cron about the farm or to sit at her writing desk. In the first weeks she chose the former, sitting at her desk in the evenings to write letters. She addressed these to Mary Sauer, shortly due to return from her long sojourn abroad, to her mother in Grahamstown, and to Jesse Rose-Innes. To Rebecca, she described her domestic arrangements in fine detail, and to her friends she expressed her absolute contentment with Cron. 'We are chums' she wrote, by which she meant how equal she felt in his company. To Jesse, she said, 'I cannot picture any other type of man who would have suited me as well.'

When Cron was out on the farm without her, Olive smoked (he had expressed his distaste for the habit), walking up and down and thinking vaguely about her work. On this

morning, she had woken to a creaking and banging of the back door. There was no movement in the house, but she could hear the wind howling outside. She pulled back the curtains and saw the gum saplings planted near the house bent over at an extreme angle, sweeping the dry red dirt with their branches. She marvelled at the suppleness of the sapling trunks that sprang back into the vertical position when the wind eased, only to be followed by another blow and sweeping of the ground. She mused that watching these young trees was like watching a graceful ballet. The rear door banged again, startling her from her reverie and she went out to close it. As soon as she stepped outside, a gust of hot wind whipped up dust into her eyes and she quickly retreated and secured the door by bolting it. On the table, Cron had left a note. He would be away for the whole day, and he reminded her of where he kept the loaded revolver in the unlikely event that she should need it. She felt sorry for Cron that he had to be away from the house on a day such as this, working in the heat and the dust, but the labour needed for the ostrich plucking had been settled and in farm life, she learnt, work must follow the demands of the seasons and the animals. She picked up the kitten that a wife of one of the shepherds had given her, and stroked its soft, brindled fur. Into its bowl she poured some milk, and laughed as the little thing lifted a whiskered face white with cream.

Olive spent the day thinking about how best to prioritise her many unfinished manuscripts. The farm was very quiet with the men absent, and all she could hear was the old clock ticking away in the dining room, and Rose moving about in the kitchen. When Cron returned late in the afternoon, he brought with him a bundle of letters, collected from the Halesowen post office, and a copy of *The Midland News.*

'Look at you,' she exclaimed as he walked in the door. 'You're covered in feathers!'

His hands and face had turned a deep red from wind burn, and his eyes were bloodshot. He appeared a little uncertain whether it was disapproval or dismay she was expressing.

'Inevitable, I'm afraid.' He cast her a weary look.

'Oh, my darling, it's been a hard day for you, I see. Was it successful?'

'A good day, twenty bags bundled and delivered to the station for transport to Algoa Bay.' He withdrew the bundle of letters from his canteen and handed them to her.

While Cron washed and changed, she flicked through the mail, many of the letters, she saw, were from England. One, with a Cape Town stamp, was from her brother, Will. She slipped it into her desk drawer unopened. Before her marriage, she had assured Will

that neither his new role as Attorney-General in the Rhodes government, nor her marriage to Cron, should ever come between them in their intimate exchanges. It was an absolute trust she knew her brother had in her, that whatever he may wish to confide to her, would go no further. Cron appeared in the room a new man, washed and shaved and wearing clean moleskins and shirt. He stood in front of her with his arms held taught by his side and his chin up.

'Better?' he said.

She felt her eyes bright and beseeching as she reached for his face and brought it down to hers so that she might rub her cheek against his. He stooped and kissed her, then turned away and fingered through the as yet unopened envelopes. Seeing that most of them were addressed to Mr and Mrs Cronwright-Schreiner, he left them on her desk for her to open. One letter was for him. It had come from the Central Farmers Association: he opened and read it, then looked across at Olive who had settled in her chair to read the correspondence.

'How would you like a trip to East London? It's the annual Farmers Congress, starts end of next week. As secretary of the Cradock Farmers, I should be in attendance.'

'Is anyone else going?' she said

'Charles will most likely. I imagine there'll be a few of us from Cradock.'

'If you don't mind taking wifey along, I think it would be lovely, especially if we can stay by the sea.'

She opened a letter post marked Port Elizabeth. It was from Miss Molteno. She and Betty Molteno had kept up a correspondence since the latter's visit to Matjesfontein, where they had discovered so much of mutual interest and admiration. Cron was now flopped in a small armchair positioned next to her desk. Sent out from England by Mary Sauer as a wedding gift, it was the only new piece of furniture in the house. The scatter cushions, she noticed, he had removed to the floor to make room for his bottom. She lifted her face to him.

'How far is East London from Port Elizabeth?'

'We won't be travelling in that direction. The East London train goes via Fort Beaufort,' he said.

'Oh, pity.'

'I can't be absent from the farm any longer than a week, Olive. Is it Miss Molteno you are thinking of?'

She waved the letter under his nose and he took it. He saw that it was addressed to them both.

'May I read?' he said. She smiled.

'I want to show you off, Cron, that's all.'

He handed the letter back to her. 'It would be a nice holiday for us, though, if we could spend a few days at the Kowie. We could visit Miss Molteno en route.'

By nightfall, the wind had died and Cron lit the paraffin lamps and they sat down to eat a meal that Olive had prepared during the day. She ate some mouthfuls of the bobotie, but she was eating slowly, stopping and starting. Cron was watching her with what appeared, mild alarm and when she pushed her unfinished dish aside, he asked, 'Are you not feeling well?'

'It's my chest, Cron. It feels tight,' she said. A frown formed on his face.

'It has been a constant worry to me, Olive, that the farm's location may not suit you.'

She reached for a glass of chilled water that made her cough. She tried to suppress the urge to cough again but it was hopeless as the coughing seemed to take charge of her whole body, and her shoulders quivered. She pushed back her chair and called in air, fast. Cron moved to her side. He rested his hand on her heaving shoulder.

'I'll bring your medical box.'

She gasped, 'I don't think I… have any morphia… been so well… bring it, maybe something...'

He sprinted to the bedroom, returning with her medicines. The compression on her chest was great. She felt sweat forming on her face and blotted at it with her napkin. He opened her box and she fumbled inside searching for her quinine snuff and a tincture. He took out the medicine glass and following her speechless instructions, poured the amount required. Her hands were shaking; she took it and gulped it down.

It was a difficult night with repeated bouts of Olive's coughing and wheezing but, by morning and a late sleep in, she woke feeling quite her old self again. Cron returned for the midday meal prepared by Rose, after which he rested and was soon making up for the sleep he had lost the previous night. She lay by his side though she needed no sleep. After a time, she got up and went outside and walked with the dogs to the river. She bathed there and then lay on the hot stones to dry off. She thought of Ed and his little creek at Millthorpe and wished that he would visit so she could show him how much nicer her river was. She thought about Cron, his alarm at her asthma attack, and his expression of

concern about the farm's location. It had given her cause to pause and wonder at their future.

The night before their departure for East London, they packed a small case of clothes and Olive packed a number of letters received at Kranz Plaats, including her brother's letter, that were awaiting a response. When Cron left the Beach Hotel to attend his meetings, she walked on the foreshore then settled to her correspondence. She turned first to Will's letter. He did not convey anything of importance in Colonial politics, or personal injury to himself of which she was glad. Rather, he had asked her a lot of questions about herself: how she was finding married life and about her interest or otherwise in having children. It was the sort of letter she felt he may have been prodded to write by Fan, who would surely have been more curious about Olive's domestic arrangements than her brother. Still, she wrote to him as if it were for his eyes only, about the comradeship she had with Cron, saying that he had grown even more dear to her. She would like to have a child, she wrote, but with her husband beside her, she would be quite contented without one. She told him about life on the farm, and added, 'if only this wretched asthma of mine stays away.'

She wrote another letter, to her journalist friend, WT Stead. She promised to send him photographs of herself and her husband among their Angora goats. She understood well the personal dimension that not only interested Stead, but that interested the English readers of his monthly paper. She imagined locations around Kranz Plaats that would capture the African farm idyll. Not that the farm of her famous novel was an especially appealing place to be, despite its misleading title. *The Story of an African Farm* was never intended as a *plaasroman*; it was a critique of colonial society in a barren landscape. Yet for the readers, she believed, her story carried a romance of a brutish kind. She thought again about her writing that, for the moment, was held in abeyance. The new and companionable experience of married life, her lightness of being, had helped her to forget the enormous pressures of her work that she had long lived under, and had too often, she now thought, punished herself over.

Soon after their return to Krantz Plaats, Olive's asthmatic attacks began in earnest. It was always the night when they happened and she and Cron agreed that it was the down country air that aggravated her chest. He insisted she give up accompanying him to the kraals because, he said, she may be infecting her lungs with dust kicked up by the goats. She turned to riding Cron's mare out across the veld. Sometimes they rode together, he on

another of the stabled horses. Once, they went chasing young brumbies, a ride that Olive found thrilling. Most often though, she rode alone, Cron always careful to check the condition of the saddle before she went out. Sometimes, on her rides on the veld, she would see Limon striding across the paddocks, rounding up the gangly ostriches, his red blanket flying out from behind him. In East London, she had consulted a doctor and her medical box was replenished with phials of morphia, but unless she was turning blue in the face, she avoided injecting because she knew that the next day would be a fog of headache and inaction. The mornings that followed a less serious attack, she spent in the saddle then bathed in the river, drying off as she liked to do, on the warmed stones. Returning to the house, she would light a cigarette and think about her manuscripts and how to progress them. Her writing was never far from her mind, though she had been a month now avoiding any serious work.

The winds that swept in from the sea, picking up the earth's heat as they travelled over the parched land had, by late April, begun to ease and Cron suggested that she might like to climb the highest peak near the farm—Buffels Kop.

'Five thousand feet above sea level, and higher than Table Mountain,' he said. He promised 'a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view.'

They started early, after breakfast, and rode through Buffels Hoek, an amphitheatre with three peaks rising above it. The blunt head on one of these peaks was the Kop and was supported by great krantzes. At the base of the mountain they tied the horses to a railing and set off on foot, Cron striding out in front leading the way. Olive tried to keep up with him but the ascent was steep and soon she was gasping for breath. She called weakly to him to wait but he didn't hear her. She tried to quicken her pace but it was no use; she had not the breath nor the strength in her short legs and she stopped. Cron turned and saw her bent over and hurried back down the slope.

'I'm alright, but could you just slow your pace?' she said.

'Sorry for leaving you, I was showing off. Once I chased a rhebok up this slope.'

'Did you catch it?'

'No, and I was left panting like you are now. Let's sit for a bit.'

'I'm alright, Cron. Just walk with me.'

He took hold of her hand leading her to the summit, stopping every few strides so that she could retain an even breath. When they reached the top, Olive looked around and was struck dumb. She had not imagined such an unearthly beauty possible. She stood gazing at the illimitable distances and the clarity of the atmosphere, and at the edges of the

surrounding mountains cut like glass against the blue sky. She did not speak; there were no words powerful enough to describe this grandeur of nature upon which her eyes fell. She looked down into the veld where once she had been a poor little governess and then to the farm where she had come just two months before as a bride. Switching her gaze to her immediate surroundings, she found her voice.

'Oh, Cron, look at that aloe!'

The plant's poker red flower was covered in butterflies, their wings flapping on and off as they drank from the honied sweetness. She counted thirty. She wanted to reach out and caress their wings. She turned again to the majestic panorama and a thought suddenly flashed on her.

'We must be buried here, you and I, Cron. I shall buy one morgen of this top.'

In late April, Cron went to Grahamstown to talk to the owner of Kranz Plaats, Mr Wood, about the problem of Olive's not being able to live on the farm. Erilda Carwood came to stay with Olive during his absence. Wondering how she could return to her writing and, at the same time, entertain Erilda, Olive had told her husband it was not necessary for her neighbour to come. 'If you have another serious attack, Olive, how would I ever forgive myself for leaving you alone in a place as isolated as Kranz Plaats?' he said. Olive had begun to think a better arrangement for their future would be for her to move, perhaps back to Matjesfontein, or closer at Middelburg and for Cron to keep on with the work that he loved. She had tried to encourage her husband to consider this as the most practical solution for them both. It would solve her health difficulties and keep him on the farm, but he had stubbonly rejected the idea.

Now that he was in Grahamstown, she decided to send him a letter, to put her thoughts on paper, say what she felt, state her preferred solution, without having to deal with his immediate and confronting protestations. She layed out the options as she saw them: that unless she could buy him a farm in a location that suited her health and his needs, it would be an agony to her for him to leave Kranz Plaats for her sake alone. It would be more bitter than for us to be separated, she said. The idea of their living apart crystallized in her mind when another possibility unexpectedly presented itself. A letter arrived from Ettie, who said that the house she and Stakesby-Lewis had vacated in Kimberly was on the market, and going cheap being as it was three miles distant from the town. Olive recalled her stay with her sister's family; how much she loved being there and how healthy she felt. She began to entertain the idea that she might be able to buy Cron a

farm, perhaps close to Kimberley. As she had predicted, Erilda was very much with Cron on the matter of their staying together at all cost. 'A farm needs water and there is none in Kimberley,' said Erilda when Olive dared to raise the possibility of a move. She began to dream of a life in the arid landscape, free of asthma and in splendid isolation, with or without her husband.

In May, Cron's mother came to stay. Olive wondered if Cron had written to her about their dilemma because she seemed to spend much of her time extolling the attributes of the farm, and of her son's admirable abilities in turning Krantz Plaats from a losing business to a profitable one. Olive was shocked when the little woman with prim English manners and virtuous demeanour said, 'You wouldn't leave Cron, would you? Because if you go he will have to leave the farm. Perhaps you don't realise, Olive, but Cron feels that you have been entrusted to him and he will stand by you, whatever the cost to him personally.'

Olive suffered a bad attack that night, and she allowed Cron's mother to administer to her while she coughed up her lungs, sweated, and gasped for breath until Cron produced the only palliative that worked. The next morning, while she nursed her head in bed, she felt more determined than ever that she and Cron must live apart.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

November 1894

Cron put his hand on her belly waiting for the kick, then his face broadened into a smile.

'She's going to be like her mother. That was a kick strong enough to knock me down,' he said.

'Mm, you think baby is a girl?'

'If it's healthy that is all that matters. I would like a girl,' he added.

They were half lying, half sitting on the bed and Cron had his arm flopped around her shoulders. He had just returned from an extended journey to Cradock, where a dinner in his honour had been organised by the Farmers Association. He had given an address on political ethics and organisation, that Olive had read through before he left the Homestead, urging him to think it out first. At her encouragement, too, he had returned to Kimberley via Hopetown where he had spent a few days with his mother. Olive asked him first about his mother, then about his speech, and then about Kranz Plaats.

'I wished I hadn't gone to the farm; it's in a terrible state. The goats have scab, the servants are unhappy; Limon spoke in Afrikaans to me; he wanted to know if I was going to farm elsewhere, because they were all going to come to me. I think the overseer has been given too much power.'

'Oh, Cron, I'm so sorry to hear it. You should have stayed, man.'

It was almost with irritation that he said, 'Aren't you happy?'

She nodded and with coyness, pressed her face into his shirted arm. Olive knew there was no point in persisting, they had gone down this road so many times. It was done and dusted, there was no going back.

'There'll be plenty of distractions here in Kimberley for us both when baby arrives, and now I have different responsibilities, for a little genius and genius' mother,' he said, patting her belly. He turned to her. 'Tell me about the visitor.'

Cron had received a letter from Olive that arrived at the Halesowen post office. In it, she told him about a stranger who had come to the Homestead. The man was, she said, a friend of Rhodes.

'Related by marriage, I think. He wanted to know my thoughts on South Africa and I told him he could read the *Fortnightly.* Then he asked me what did I think of Mr Rhodes, and I told him straight. I said I admired the man's genius but I detested his methods, but mainly for the men who sucked the dust from his feet!'

Cron gave a high laugh. 'That would have brought him up short.'

Olive thought about her visitor, he was pleasant enough but she had the feeling that it was Rhodes who requested he call on her. In a way it pleased her to think she retained some kind of power over him and she wondered if he was still seeking from her some kind of absolution. Though his visits to Kimberley were not infrequent, Rhodes had not dared venture to the Homestead himself. She recognised this for what it was: she was married now and he would be entering another man's territory.

'Yes, it did rather. He apologised for attending on me in my alone state. He said he was not aware that my husband was away, and left soon after.' She gripped Cron's arm. 'You're my security blanket. I'm glad to have you back, I missed you. Which reminds me, I'm expecting a parcel from Cape Town. I've asked Fan to send up some loquats and some pickled fish.'

'You'll eat the fruit though I doubt you'll eat the fish,' he said, giving her a teasing pinch. Olive was sorry that she hadn't enjoyed the prized river fish at Kranz Plaats.

The house that Olive had bought in the winter was small though its layout conveyed something bigger with a verandah on three sides, shaded by an overhanging iron roof, and with railing and canvas flaps on the front side where beds could be erected for visitors. They had left the farm in August, the bullock wagon loaded with all their worldly possessions. They had transferred to the train, offloading and reloading at Kimberley. Though she suspected as much, her pregnancy was not confirmed until her visit to the Kimberley doctor soon after they had settled at the Homestead. She hoped that a new little person would go some way to compensating Cron for his loss of the farm. She knew how hard that decision had been for him, but as the rational, practical man she had come to love and respect, she felt his determination to get on with life would carry him through. He refused to look back and if he had misgivings, he held them too close for her to see.

It was Saturday, and Cron had gone into the Kimberley station to collect Olive's parcel coming from Cape Town. The days were getting warmer and water was scarce and Olive wandered over to an area of ground she had planted with strawberry seedlings in October. They had flourished but the fruit buds nestled in their white flowers were tiny

and green, and it would be days yet before they were fat and ripe enough to pick. Mary Sauer had sent other seedlings, violets, pansies and marigolds from Stellenbosch where the Sauer family had a small holding. These, too, Olive had planted out. She felt a great joy when her garden flowers bloomed, but with the early summer heat she found them sadly wilting. She retired to her small study to read. Settling in a chair, she flicked through the pages of a book picked up from the Kimberley library. It was a copy of Walter Bagehot's *Physics and Politics* that she had read years before but now, she thought, a second reading with her more finely tuned mind for political behaviour would bring new rewards. Bagehot's passages on the stages of civilisation—from militarism to liberalism—she found especially interesting.

When Cron returned, he dropped Fan's basket of food in the kitchen and entered the house brimming with enthusiasm. He hung on the door of her study, his face flushed and expectant.

'You won't believe who I've met.'

'In Kimberley there are a hundred possibilities, surely,' she said, looking up.

'I've met Mr Selous. He was just going about his business in the bank and I approached him and introduced myself.'

'Who, pray, is Mr Selous?'

'You know, FC Selous, the famous game hunter.'

Olive shuddered. The man she had accosted at Lord Loch's garden party was enough, she didn't want to meet any more game hunters. Besides, the name meant nothing to her, and her blank stare elicited further prompts from Cron.

'Allan Quatermain?' he said.

'That's Ryder Haggard,' she said.

'Mr Selous *was* Allan Quatermain!'

Olive was confused. 'What do you mean?' Cron's good humour was wearing thin.

'Don't you know anything, Olive? Haggard's character was based on Mr Selous.'

She humphed. 'Well, I don't know much about adventure stories. They are like straw to me. If you want to read adventure, you'd be better reading Kipling.'

'Exactly so, but Selous is a friend of Rhodes, apparently.

'That's not a recommendation!'

Cron shrugged and retreating, he said, 'Well, I'm sorry, but I have invited him to visit us. We might learn something.'

Olive returned uncomfortably to Bagehot, unsettled by her lack of generosity to Mr Haggard who, though she had never met the novelist, had been very generous to her in his review of her novel for the *Contemporary Review*. Of all her reviewers, perhaps with the exception of Havelock Ellis, H Rider Haggard had captured the essence of her art and praised *The Story of an African Farm* for being 'out of the ordinary'. Shaded by the verandah's overhang, her study remained one of the coolest rooms in the house. She opened out its window, and a warm gust of wind blew in the scent of mimosa and summer. Her mind drifted to the protagonist of Haggard's adventure stories. She was curious now to meet Mr Selous.

The game hunter arrived in a hired cart at the Homestead. The skin of his face, Olive thought, was like chewed leather, though beneath it she saw its handsome contours and strong jaw. They sat down together on the Homestead's newly acquired sofa, Olive on one end and Mr Selous on the other. Cron sat in his Madeira chair. Olive had put out a plate of pickled fish and loquats, and Cron offered their guest a glass of brandy. Despite his powerful physique and reputation, Selous appeared a modest man. He explained that he was in Kimberley for just a few days before returning to Cape Town to meet his new wife who was arriving from England. Together, they would then travel to 'Rhodesia' where he had taken up land. His mention of the territory north of the Limpopo that had unofficially acquired Rhodes' name, brought forth in Olive a desire to know more. Had he been there during the Matabele War, she wanted to know. The war was fresh in his memory, he said, and asked what did she want to know.

'I was in England at the time, and there was very little coverage in the British press.' She was reluctant to give too much of her personal opinion about the Chartered Company's activities for fear of Mr Selous clamming up. If he had acquired land there, then it was land stolen from the Matabele's neighbours, the Mashona. It was Olive's belief that Rhodes, in his quest for land and minerals, had exploited tribal divisions to put down the fierce Matabele warriors.

She said, 'Governor Loch is a personal friend of mine and I know that he had tried to wrest control of the situation in the interests of British justice, and against…what should I call it… the self-interested motives of the Company in waging war against the natives.'

'Rhodesia is still governed by the Company, Mrs Schreiner. We have a police force, there is law and order, and peace now. There have been great strides made. We even have electric light in Bulawayo,' he said, with a proud smile.

Olive bristled at her visitor's attempt to paint a rosy picture of the scrambled territory named for its conqueror.

'But the cattle, Mr Selous? As I understand it, the pioneer force stole cattle from the natives, and as I'm sure you know, the Matabele and the Shona are cattlemen and depend on their cows for milk and meat, in fact for their own independent lifestyle.'

Selous took a swig of brandy and begged approval to his lighting a cigar. Cron brought up an ashtray.

'We are interested to hear about these matters, of course,' said Cron, '…but we are equally excited to meet you as we believe you are, in another guise, the great white hunter of the Haggard adventure stories.'

Selous let out a low laugh, and Cron grinned contritely at Olive. She smiled sourly and began to fidget.

'Well, it is what has been said of me, but I don't know and I have never met Mr Haggard personally.' Selous said.

Olive watched him take a long draft of his cigar, and she reached for her cigarettes thinking Cron could not object if he allowed a stranger to fill the house with the smoke and scent of the Savannah. After lighting up she prompted,

'The cattle question, Mr Selous.'

'It was a big mistake I grant you, but a deliberate one you understand. Rhodes does not want the native to have an independent lifestyle. The new farms, and mining ventures he hopes to develop, are in desperate need of labour.' Cron and Olive exchanged furtive glances. She was glad that the man, however unwittingly, had confirmed her suspicions about what had occurred in the north and the motives behind the Chartered Company's actions. For Rhodes, it was not just a matter of expanding his control over land or minerals, but of acquiring cheap labour.

When the game hunter left, Olive told Cron what she thought of their visitor.

'He is a big man in a small compass,' she said.

Olive was much exercised in mind over the following days about what she had learnt from Mr Selous. She saw the labour question as key to the organisation of societies everywhere. In England, it was drawn along class lines; in South Africa, along racial lines. It was how the capitalist class ruled. She now saw the disenfranchisement of blacks working its way insidiously alongside the capitalist's demand for labour. A lateral thought entered her head. Was it a necessary pre-condition of women's confinement to the

domestic sphere of work that they be denied the franchise? This was not a new thought for Olive, but observing the connection in South Africa between labour and political rights, had rekindled in her mind the Woman Question. She thought again of her planned scientific book, the gestation of which had been long. Soon her head ached and she was weary of these questions. She turned her thoughts to more immediate concerns, of her own forthcoming labour and her need for food.

The sickness that had plagued her in the first months of pregnancy had passed and she was once again enjoying her meals, and she snacked, most recently on the juicy loquats that Fan had sent up. She felt healthier than she had ever felt, yet even in her comfortable sense of well-being, she found it difficult to settle to her unfinished manuscripts. Instead, she began to write letters to the unborn child, and as her belly grew, she felt 'baby' becoming quite a companion to her. She wrote a list of all the books she wanted it to read, and she wrote little stories for a child's ear. At times, she felt a curious anxiety for its future. She announced her pregnancy in a letter to Adela, saying she was glad about it, but 'in a solemn sort of way'. From Mary Sauer she sought practical advice about birthing: 'Does it help to have a hot bath when labour starts?' she asked, explaining in her letters that she was tired of the doctors she had consulted. 'They help one so little, and tell nothing.'

Fred sent her two lovely gowns for the baby from England, and she found herself taking them out of the drawers regularly to admire and to dream. Cron said that if she were not careful, she would wear them out before the baby came, and she laughed at her own silliness. Outside, it was 106 degrees in the shade, the Homestead's iron roof creaked and Olive felt she was radiating heat all around. She had developed a waddle to her walk and she caught Cron's amused expression when she brought in their tea. He was sprawled on the sofa, his shirt and shoes off and his trouser legs rolled up.

'What's funny?'

'You remind me of a Boulders Beach penguin,' he said, sitting up and reaching for his cup. She sat down next to him and fondly ran her fingers though his dark curls.

She teased. 'You can visit the penguin colony when you're in Cape Town and take a photo for me of your favourite bird, and I shall call it 'Olive.'

'Doubt I shall get there on this trip but I would like to take a photo of you before I go, so that we can show baby when it reaches the age of curiosity.'

'I shall be impatient for her to grow. Eight or nine are the best ages, when children are curious and can be taught,' she said. He smiled, a tremor of amusement on his lips.

Cron and Olive hired a young girl to help about the place and to keep Olive company during Cron's absence. She welcomed the girl's presence, and her infectious cackle at Olive's antics—her predilection to behave in a childish manner when she was alone with her servants. 'You're not like a proper missus!' the girl whooped. She wondered, though, how long the girl would stay. Past attempts at having home help had not worked as the Homestead was too far out of town, and the road to it unlit and unpaved. Despite the company, Olive missed Cron badly, especially at night when she ran her hand over his pillow, burying her face in it seeking out his scent. In the day, she pictured him, the intensity of his dark eyes and the crease of skin between his eyebrows. She imagined him sitting down with Will and Fan in their new house at Rondebosch. She wrote him a letter. She urged him to walk in the woods where 'Rebekah' her character in her still to be finished novel walked. She recommended he stay a day beyond the Congress and go walking on the Mountain with Mary Sauer. Mary loved to walk there, she said, and she wanted the two of them to get to know each other. She rested her pen, leant back on the chair and stroked her rounded tummy, feeling the pulsing life beneath. She finished the letter: 'Your tiny baby and I send our love to the Baas.'

In her aloneness, she began to be plagued by morbid thoughts that were most intense in the quiet of her bedroom. She thought about death and the tragedy of separation—wrought by death's inevitability—from those one loves. She thought about her baby, and with a fearful biting of her bottom lip considered the possibility of its death if not her own. Her disquiet had arisen from a squabble between two Kimberley doctors over which nurse they would or would not accept as their assistant at the birth. Dr Watkins had recommended an old Scottish nurse. Dr Ashe, the younger of the Kimberley doctors whom Olive had engaged, objected strongly claiming he would never want a drunken woman at the birthing table. The small-town mentality and petty professional jealousies were driven home to Olive and Cron in a most personal and unpleasant manner when Dr Ashe wrote an angry letter to Cron about their choice of nurse. Cron had gone in person to see him, to calm the man. Olive said she was only trying to placate old Watkins, for not choosing him as her doctor.

When she received Cron's letter from Cape Town in reply to her own, she cried. He was anxious that baby would be born during his absence, and feeling so, he wrote,

there was no point in trying to enjoy himself in Cape Town. He would be on the first train home. She blew her nose, hugged his pillow and imagined their joyful reunion.

The days and weeks to the birth seemed to Olive to last interminably. She felt heavy and sluggish and lacking in mental energy and seemed able only to potter about the house. She settled to reading a new novel that the critics claimed was a protest against the subjection of women, but she didn't much enjoy it, thinking it lacked artistic merit. In the mail, she received from Edward Carpenter a copy of his recently published pamphlet on Marriage, a far better read, she thought. It was the third in his three-part work on Love in a Free Society. She responded immediately. His treatise was splendid, she wrote, except he had overlooked one important element—the historical and cultural understanding of the man-woman relationship. This cultural understanding implied inferiority on the one side and superiority on the other. It was not the same for men friends, she said, because there was no tradition that said one was inferior to the other. Given this, it was necessary, she insisted, for women to have monetary equality with men before true friendship could be reached.

With Cron's return, Olive had freed herself from her morbid fears about the birth and together they discussed post-natal plans. She agreed to his mother coming to stay once the nurse had left. She would then travel to Grahamstown, she said, when baby was six weeks, so that her own dear old mother could hold her new grandchild. She poured them coffee and Cron changed the subject. Spreading marmalade on his toast he said,

'Fan's brother is not well.'

'President Reitz? What's wrong with him, did Fan say?'

'She thinks he may have suffered a minor stroke, but he is in the care of his doctors and seems to be recovering.'

'That's the second stroke her brother has had.' Olive's mind jumped forward, thinking who might replace Reitz should he be forced to resign the Presidency of the Boer Republic on the Orange River. 'They would put de Villiers in I should think.'

'Do you mean as president? Reitz is not dead yet, Olive.' He crunched his toast and flicked a page of his paper and she pushed back her chair.

'Excuse me, dear,' she said, and heard her husband mutter his assent from behind the broadsheet. She went directly to her study, and wrote a hurried letter to Will.
'If President Reitz's health gives way, de Villiers might take his place and you could become Chief Justice. I should like this; I should like to see you out of the world of party

politics.' Her letter was not yet done when she felt a strong pain in her belly and an unpleasant urge to relieve herself.

The pain was intense and Olive groaned. Cron gripped her hand and the nurse said she was to take quick short breaths and bear down when she felt the contractions. It seemed to Olive she had been doing that for hours. Her face and night-gown were wet with her own sweat. She wondered why her baby was refusing to be born. Doctor Ashe placed the Pinard horn against her stomach. She sensed alarm, and panicked.

'Is baby alright, Cron?' she begged.

'He can hear the baby's heartbeat and says it is in the right position,' said Cron. She felt a great weakness come over her and heard the words 'foetal distress'. The next she could remember before they clamped on the gas was the doctor wielding a pair of forceps.

In the early afternoon of the thirtieth of April, 1895, Cron rode into town to send a telegram to Ettie.

Fine baby girl, all well.

Cron was by her side again when she regained consciousness. He said their baby girl was healthy and was with nurse, and doctor's orders were for Olive to rest. That night she heard her baby cry in the other room. A rush of maternal love and pure joy flooded every sensory part of her being. She was still woozy from the chloroform, and fell restfully to sleep again. Four hours later, a slit of sunlight through the curtained window woke her. All was quiet. Then distant voices became audible. She realised they were voices coming from the baby's room. She thought it was Cron's voice, and nurse's, filtering through, coming to her in low tones. They were speaking softly, the sounds discordant. She thought she heard nurse sobbing and there was Cron's voice again, its cadence unnatural. She called to him, and the voices fell away. When he entered her room, his face was dark and his brow knitted and Olive knew.

Cron sent another telegram:

To Ettie Stakesby-Lewis. 1st May

Our baby is dead.

Before he went into town to wire his painful news, Olive asked him to bring their baby to her. The young nurse came in; her eyes were blurry red and there were rivulets of stain on her face where tears had silently fallen. Olive asked that her baby's clothing be removed

so that she could see her in her natural state. She was a beautiful strong creature with full round face. The nurse said she weighed nine pound and nine ounces at her birth. Olive looked for marks on its little body and finding none, her eyes watered up. She let slip an agonised cry, then held the child against her breast, and when she lifted it, its little arms seemed to take hold of her neck. She stayed like that, holding her baby girl for ten hours, inconsolable at the child having left her too soon. By late afternoon, Cron suggested they dress the little one in the gown Fred had sent out from England. He would like to take a photo of their daughter.

The baby should not have died. Had Ettie been with her, Olive believed, it would have lived. Had any mother been with her, Mary Sauer or any of the countless other experienced women who had offered help. The nurse had been gentle and supportive during a difficult labour, but she was young, unmarried, what did she know of childbirth? Against her own aching heart, she felt Cron's loss more deeply; he had so wanted that little girl. He tried to console her by reminding her of what the doctor had said; that her age was against her, warning that it might be a difficult birth, and it had been. She recoiled at the memory of it, but an anger swelled in her breast; her baby had been born alive so what could Cron mean? She remained silent and he said no more. Deep in her heart she felt a wrong had been done to her and the little one, and a sense of remorse brought with it the unforgiving pain of a mother's loss.

Sadness hung in threads on the air while they waited for the coffin to arrive from Johannesburg. They didn't talk; they couldn't talk. Instead, she wrote Cron a letter.

'Our little baby was born at a quarter past twelve, I was put under chloroform and became insensible at a quarter past eleven. When I became conscious at half-past three on the afternoon of the 30th she had been born a couple of hours. She lived that night. The last time I heard her cry from the other room was at a quarter past four. When I woke at nine you told me she was dead.'

Olive did not want their baby buried in the Kimberley cemetery, she wanted to keep her close by, so that she could protect her. Cron measured out the plot in the yard he had selected. She heard the slap of shovels against the stony ground, each strike sending a painful reminder of her loss and a sense of utter despair. She was sitting on the stoep holding the tiny corpse to her painful breasts, and could see the men at their work. Her eyes fell on Cron's khaki trousers that were covered in red dust. It was the colour of the earth she loved and unto which her baby would be delivered. She whispered to the

newborn dead. Cron was leaning his shovel against the wall and now he was walking towards her. Beads of sweat had formed on his face, and she imagined they were tears of sorrow. She lifted her baby to her lips, pressing them lovingly on its forehead. The little body was cold and lifeless and she gulped back a choke. Cron leant over Olive, pulling the blanket that had slipped from her shoulder up close under her chin. She covered the little yellow face with the lace crocheted by a grandmother it would never know, and he carried the tiny corpse to its casket. A memory flashed on Olive of her father removing the body of her baby sister, Ellie, from her clutch. They had had to prize open Olive's fingers. She saw Cron reach for his shovel, and she looked away into the distance as though reading a future yet uncertain.

In the days following the burial, Olive chose only to remember the sight of the little box with its shell white enamel she had painted on the inside, and what she had written there. She seemed to gather strength, at least emotionally, from re-reading her famous novel. Cron was alarmed when she asked him to find his copy of *An African Farm* and bring it to her so that she could read again what had happened to Lyndall. The character she had created had displayed great stoicism at her loss. The irony was almost too much to bear: her life had trumped her art.

Olive remained physically weak, and barely able to walk. Milk, too, had started to flow and her breasts were sore. Cron stayed by her for ten days and ten nights, leaving only to fetch her medicines or the doctor. With the help of the servant girl, the Homestead could run itself, he said. On the sixteenth day, she wrote to her sister, Ettie. Her letter received, brought some levity to the Schreiner family's sadness. 'I had enough milk for two babies!' Olive had written. She grew tired of lying down and asked Cron if he would help her into her armchair. He placed a blanket over her knees.

'What can I bring you?' he said.

'Pass me my cigarettes, will you?'

He didn't like her smoking at the best of times.

'Are you sure you should?'

She rolled her eyes into her head then allowed a reluctant smile to cross her face. Cron seemed to brighten as though reminded of the way she used to be. He passed her cigarette case and brought up an ashtray. He pulled up a chair and sat next to her.

'I'm expected in Cape Town this month,' he said. 'But I won't leave you.'

'Then I'll have to travel with you,'she said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

He looked doubtful. ‘Give it a few more days and we can take a short drive, see how you go.’

‘Will do us both good, I should think, to have a change of scene.’ She had already decided that she had to harden, that all that mattered to her now was her work and the sooner she could return to it the better for both of them.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

July 1895

In late June, the Cronwright-Schreiners paid their visit to Cape Town. Olive struggled to be lively, but even to talk with her family was difficult. Speaking in private with Will, however, she found herself disengage from her tragedy as he brought her up to date on Cape affairs, and she quizzed him about the office of Attorney-General: what were the big demands on him, what matters had he been required to deal with, what compromises had he been forced to make? She thought her brother seemed more guarded than usual on these personal matters of the office he held.

Cron attended to his business affairs and soon they were journeying home again. When the train stopped for refreshments at Matjesfontein, Olive was reluctant to step out for fear of seeing people she knew who would want to commiserate with her or worse, to congratulate her. Cron bundled her into the ladies' waiting room and took her back to the Kimberley bound train where she said she would stay, urging him to go and have his breakfast. Chugging out of the station, he reached into his overcoat pocket and withdrew a wrapped bacon sandwich. Olive took it greedily. Since the baby's birth, she had developed an insatiable hunger. When she had finished brushing away crumbs, she said wistfully,

'I love my brother.'

'I love Will, too,' said Cron.

This prompted her to reveal snippets of her private conversation with Will to Cron, but Will's involvement with Rhodes, she said, made her uneasy. Olive had felt a trifle hurt by Will's apparent discomfort in discussing matters of state. The more she dwelled on this sense of being shut out, and the more distant from Cape Town they travelled, the more it churned in her stomach. 'He is wasted in this government, riven as it is by corruption and self-interest. These men think only of themselves, and will do anything to hold onto power, not just for power's sake but to advance the wealth of their class. Capitalism is greed, pure and simple! My brother is not like these men. He is noble, and he has marvellous powers of mind that could be put to a higher use.'

Cron listened, and as the train rattled along, he bent his head down to hers. 'I have an idea,' he said. 'Why don't we write a paper, introduce our local citizenry to Edward

Carpenter's ideas on respectability?' Not ready to be comforted, she gave him a mocking stare.

'I doubt anyone in Kimberley has heard of socialism, let alone Edward Carpenter!'

'Well, it would be a beginning, wouldn't it?' he said. She allowed herself to relax a little. It was an idea, and it was what she loved about Cron; he was not a man to be easily defeated. Lowering her voice to a whisper, she said. 'Ed has a male lover, you know.'

Without emotion, he said, 'No, I didn't. You hadn't told me. Perhaps that's why he understands women.'

Their gaze flicked to the window at the bush and mountains running by and Olive stole a sideways glance at her husband, wondering what he thought about her revelation. Cron had been a fervent admirer of the man's writing and had even kept her photo of Carpenter's portrait on his mantle. She thought it was Ed at his most handsome, captured by the artist, Roger Fry. She tucked her arm through Cron's and thought more about presenting Carpenter to the insular world of Colonial society. She could, she thought, once again use her pen, this time for the good of her countrymen. Her thoughts wandered to Ed and her days at Millthorpe and meeting George Merrill. She felt a twinge of sadness that they hadn't come out to South Africa, Edward and George, as she had hoped. She folded her hand into Cron's.

They arrived back at Kimberley as the sun was melting into the horizon, leaving a pink sky in its wake. They hired a cart to convey themselves to the Homestead, and as the cart-horse trotted along the well-worn track, Olive's shoulders swayed in unison with its lopsided gait. The overgrown acacia bushes that grew along the path leading up to the house brushed at the side of the cart bathing her cloak in yellow gold, and she made a sound of spontaneous pleasure.

Though many offers of support and companionship arrived in letters, Olive eschewed them. She cancelled her trip to Grahamstown and Cron notified his mother and sister not to come. She replied kindly to her well-meaning friends explaining that she had to harden, like the ancient Greeks who went into solitary mourning for three months. She made one exception. She wrote to her English flat-mate, Alice Corthorn, asking her opinion about why her baby had died. Alice was a medical doctor whom Olive had helped through to graduation during her years in England. They had first met at the British Museum in the eighties, Alice was governessing at the time and it was her day off. Alice had spoken of

her ambition to become a doctor, and Olive rallied to her cause with emotional and financial support so that the young woman might continue with her studies. It was a way to requite her own failure in that pursuit.

Olive gained strength in the winter by turning to her writing, and she encouraged her husband to develop his own public persona through attending literary meetings and giving talks. In July, Cron presented their paper on Edward Carpenter's ideas—a paper written largely by Olive—to the Kimberley Literary Society. They rehearsed his address. He would introduce Carpenter to the Kimberley audience as 'an earnest Socialist who consistently lives the great, simple life he advocates in his writings.' Cron would then read his paper as Olive had drafted it… *With regard to the man himself, a friend writes me as follows…* It was the same sleight of hand used by William Morris in introducing his 'News from Nowhere', and, she thought, terribly clever in covering authorial identity.

On the evening of Cron's address to the Literary Society, Olive nervously awaited his return from town. Finding it difficult to settle to reading or writing, she lit all the lanterns and a fire in the grate and paced about, ducking into the kitchen with unusual frequency to pick at food. When he walked in the door, she gathered from the smug expression on his face, his address had been a success. He removed his collar and cuffs and took his place at the dining table where she had left a meal. She immediately demanded to know everything that had happened.

'It was as you had predicted,' he said, lifting the cover off his plate and shaking out his napkin. With wry humour, he recounted the words of one fellow who had got up at the end of the presentation and said he was very much interested in Mr Schreiner's paper, but wondered what Mr Carpenter meant in speaking about 'respectability'. Olive's suspense gave way to an almost hysterical outburst.

'I knew it; I knew it! Oh, how I would have liked to be a fly on the wall.'

'Nice old fellow, deeply earnest,' said Cron.

Her mirth subsided. 'What are the prospects of the paper being printed?'

'The Society editor is going to run off two hundred pamphlets for us and promises to put a bundle in the Kimberley library.'

Cron seemed quite cock-a-hoop about his outing locally as a public speaker, and this pleased her.

'We are a team,' she said, draping her arms around his neck.

'Put me down and let me eat in peace,' he protested.

Kimberley's newspaper, *The Diamond Fields Advertiser,* reproduced Cron's address in full and she wrote excitedly to Ed to say how she was spreading the word and how it may lead to an increase in sales of his books in South Africa. Mary Sauer sent up some more seedlings for her to plant out, and on a warm winter morning when the wind had dropped, this she did around the little mound of brown earth in the yard. She called to Cron to come and look and glancing up she saw him standing on the stoep watching her. She thought she saw him frowning, but she waved her trowel at him to come and join her.

'What have you planted?' he called as he approached.

'Violets and lilies.'

'English flowers.' He stood by her.

'Mary sent them up,' she said.

She put down her trowel and began to walk up and down. Turning back to her husband, she said,

'Cron, I think we must write that paper we have talked about, for our English brethren.'

'On the political situation? I agree, but I'm still working at my goat book; would like to have that one finished and out to the publishers. We could do with some extra income.'

She flinched. Whenever Cron mentioned money, or the lack of it, she felt a pang of guilt.

'I'll write the paper. I'm not sure how hard to go, but we need more light, more air in this country, people not being afraid to say what is in their hearts.'

'Be mindful of Will,' he cautioned.

Since the game hunter's visit, Cron had sought out views from men he met in town, and Olive wrote to Seymour Fort in Mashonaland asking for information about the Chartered Company's activities in the north. She asked him his opinion of Mr Rhodes. When Seymour Fort's reply came, he confirmed her view about the low side of Rhodes' nature, and said she was mistaken to think the man had any morality. It hurt Olive that her friend should be so utterly dismissive of another human being. In her view, Rhodes was a man of genius who could have taken a different path to greatness. Instead, he had chosen the worst side of his nature to lead him there.

Later, she sat alone in her study thinking out the political paper she had committed herself to writing. It was the monopolists, Englishmen, who had through their lust for

wealth created a force that had set her country back years. She thought about Keir Hardy's Independent Labour Party and the successes of the English gas workers and dockers in winning their struggles for shorter working hours and better pay, and she contrasted this with the almost slave-like conditions of black workers in her own country. She dipped her pen in the ink jar. *While the civilised countries of Europe were broadening their electoral base, extending manhood suffrage to all classes, the Cape Colony had set about restricting the vote to benefit the monopolists.* She paused. A poem by the American, James Lowell, 'Once to Every Man and Nation' coursed through her mind. She would construct her argument thus: to contrast the progressives of the civilized world…she tapped her pen on her chin and it came to her—the 'retrogressive movement' in the Colony. She imagined Cron delivering the speech in his deep, serious voice and unruffled manner to a captivated audience, and she felt a rush of excitement. As suddenly, she saw horror in the latent scene as Rhodes' supporters collaborated to bring her husband down. She stood up and paced the room. She wouldn't name names. Fleetingly, she thought about referencing her own brother as a member of the government she criticised—a kind of proof of impartiality—but Cron had wisely advised against it. She knew it would be difficult for Will to wear her outspokenness on the matter of political corruption. By virtue of their familial ties, accusations may be levelled at him but she would write to Will and explain her sincerity, even if her paper came with a storm.

Cron and Olive had not been able to retain the services of the teenage girl after the baby's birth; she had left their employ for the reason echoed by others before her— they lived too far from town. Cron, however, didn't like to leave Olive alone, and as another trip called, he asked around in Kimberley and found a boy looking for employment. He came with the endorsement of his previous employer, a town trader known to Cron. The boy couldn't cook but he was useful in the kitchen and good at chopping wood and carrying water—a reliable boy—the trader said. When Cron returned home with the mail and groceries, he relayed this information to Olive.

'Did you speak to the boy?' she asked.

'Yes, he's a bit wild in appearance, but seems reliable and is eager for work.'

'You are the better judge of character when it comes to servants, so if you think he will do, I'd be happy to have him here.' She broke off to glance at the mail and the front page of the local newspaper. 'Be a dear and carry the dinner pot into the dining room. I'll

bring the vegetables,' she said, waving her hand in the direction of the stove. 'You'll need the mitts; it's hot.'

Cron set about carving the pot roast she had prepared for them, secreting burnt bits of meat into his mouth. Olive chuckled, feeling the satisfaction of feeding the man. 'I'm ravenous,' he said. 'How much for you?'

They were well into their meal when Cron paused still holding his knife and fork, and stared at her like a man who had just discovered a stranger in his midst.

'Do you realise you have not suffered a single attack of asthma since we moved to Kimberley? He sounded pleasantly surprised.

She could have reminded him of the evening after the dust storm last year when she found herself gasping for breath and he had searched out her medicine box. She grinned.

'The pregnancy was good for me; it seemed to put things to right.'

He gave her an uncertain smile and returned to his dinner. She turned to the matter of the paper she was writing.

'The Glen Grey Act,' she said. 'I have fingered Rhodes for it.'

He swallowed potato and sliced forcefully through a shave of meat. 'And you should; Rhodes was responsible for bringing the bill forward.'

'Don't you think we would be opening ourselves to litigation?' she said.

Cron didn't answer her. He seemed to be ruminating on the law that had passed through the Cape Parliament the previous winter. The Act had established a system of individual land tenure for the tribal lands in the district that took its name. The enactment had also created a labour tax to force native men into employment on white farms and industries. He swallowed his last mouthful and wiped at his moustache, then pushed back against his chair.

'Listen, Olive, it's his method—deprive the natives of their independent means then force them into master servant employment by taxing those who don't want to work for the white man. He did the same to the Matabele in the North. Remember what the game hunter, told us? Rhodes can't use a gun on our Cape Colony natives, but as a Cape Colony law-maker he can achieve the same ends.' She saw his fist clench beside his plate. 'That's what the Glen Grey Act is, the same ends by different means!' he said, bringing his fist down hard on the table.

Olive jumped, startled by his outburst, and her mind went back to the visit paid them shortly after the bill was passed into law. Mr Tengo-Jabavu, the editor of the African

newspaper from Queenstown had come begging Cron to stand for Parliament in the electoral district of Glen Grey. She and Cron both knew that the doctrine of individual property ownership was morally repugnant to the Bantu, and Tengo-Jabavu was anxious to unseat the Afrikaner member who had supported the bill. 'A man can have his own cow and knife but *land* is for all,' he had said. 'The English farmers will vote for you, Mr Schreiner, and the Kaffirs.' She recalled the man's deep, impressive almost musical voice. She regretted now that she had opposed Cron entering politics. 'A man can't stand straight,' she had enjoined.

Cron brought the 'wild' boy to the house. Olive peered through the shutters at him as he helped Cron unhitch the horse. She watched him waiting with the vehicle while Cron went to the stables. The boy's dress was ragged, and on his head sat an old felt hat. He was barefoot. She withdrew into the room when she saw Cron striding determinedly towards the house, the boy almost tripping over to keep up. She waited until she heard them on the stoep before going out.

'This is Blessing,' said Cron.

Olive put out a tentative hand. The boy didn't take it, but looked down at his feet.

'Well, you are a blessing,' she said. 'Thank you for coming to us. Baas will show you your jobs and where you'll be sleeping. Then you can eat in the kitchen.'

In the days that followed, they spent a lot of time together, Blessing and Olive. She made him laugh in the same way she had the teenage girl, behaving like a silly woman. She would not allow Cron to see her antics because she knew he would not approve, but it was her way of making her young servants feel at ease with their new employer. Whether it was uneducated blacks, London prostitutes, or poor whites, she liked to meet people at what she felt was their level. These people of the lower classes, she believed, had more goodness in each one of them than those capitalists who ruled the Colony put together. In her view, God didn't make men unequal, society did that.

By the time Cron returned from Hopetown, Olive had finished drafting her political paper. Resting in his chair, he read through 'The Political Situation', a title they had both agreed was simple and direct. His concentration was intense, his brows drawn together, stroking his moustache as he read. When he had finished, he exclaimed mockingly, 'Rhodes, the capitalist champion!' Olive was beginning to feel that her husband had a greater dislike of Rhodes than she did herself, but she also knew that it was the Premier's Janus face that

Cron most detested. This had shown itself when stock farmers were hit by an outbreak of scab disease in their flocks, and Rhodes had played to the conservative rump of the Afrikander Bond party who were protecting the small-time sheep holders of the Western Cape, hostile to government intervention. These were men who preferred to look to the Bible for explanation in dealing with the outbreak than to science. Cron had shown anger, as had many farmers of the Eastern Provence who, as a collective, had written to *The Cape Times,* expressing their outrage at the government's inaction. One politician in opposing a compromised Scab Bill that had eventually made its way into the Parliament, warned the government would suffer the fate of King Rehobaam who instead of listening to the advice of the elders (experience) took that of the young (science).

'What about scab disease and the government's abject failure in addressing it? If the Australian colonies could eradicate disease in their livestock by taking firm measures, so could we have,' he said, thrusting the paper back to her.

She began to pace about the room, swinging the draft document at her side like a baton. 'Parish pump politics! And then there's the taxing of wheat and flour, while the export of diamonds and liquor go untaxed.' She paused and turned to him. 'Oh, Cron, there's so much that needs to be said.' She expected to see a confirming look, a nod or a half smile but instead she saw a face of gloom.

As darkness fell around the house and they settled to their reading, Olive could not stay focussed. She had seen something in Cron's face that was disturbing. There was, she thought, inside the man an unsettled soul, a repressed anger, and wondered if he was still mourning the death of their baby. She knew that if it were the case and left to fester, it would destroy them. She glanced up and saw his brow furrowed over eyes cast down on the open page. She felt an overwhelming need to reach out, to calm and sooth him. She put down her book and crossed the floor and motioned to him that she wanted to sit on his lap. He appeared startled, but put aside his reading and welcomed her. Their lips met and she held hers firm to his smoochingly and soon they were petting. He ran his hand over her breasts, and she nuzzled into his neck. She did not hold back; she wanted him to take her.

'But we can't, Olive,' he said. 'I would only hurt you.'

She heard in those words a repressed longing that made her desire strong. She was still recovering from the physical damage done to her during the birth but she knew there were other ways to meet their love needs. She wanted them to lie naked in bed together,

she said. He kissed her again with an ardour that almost hurt and then he gently pushed her up and took off his boots and socks. The night brought them a release from the months of sadness and loss and she felt the distance that had come between them close over.

When she woke, Cron was not beside her. Rain was pelting at the windows and she heard what sounded like stones clattering on the tin roof. A storm had broken. She leapt from bed, feeling anxious for her husband. She went quickly to the back door; it was swinging open on its hinge and water had penetrated into the dining room. She closed it and ran to the side of the house from where she could hear voices. The floorboards on the stoep were slimy and shimmering where rain had blown in. Then she saw Blessing and Cron coming out from the stable. Cron was carrying a large canvas awning and the boy was carrying Cron's toolbox and gimlets. They scurried to the stoep to take shelter. Cron didn't come in and when the rain eased, she saw them move off in the direction of baby's grave and the little planted out garden that surrounded it. She saw in the yard lumps of ice ball and the next time she looked, these had all but melted away. The sun had come out and she could see that Cron had erected a shelter over the burial garden. She dressed quickly and went to the kitchen and lit a fire and put the kettle on the hob. When the men came in they were sodden and she told them she would bring dry clothes and they were to stand by the fire and make themselves warm. Cron removed his dripping hat and hung it on the peg and as he turned, she saw his eyes were bright and smiling and it gladdened her heart.

Olive wanted to visit the library and Cron suggested they dine at the Victoria Hotel. It was, he said, reputed to be the best eating house in Kimberley. She knew some of the town folk, traders and professionals with whom they had done business, but she did not have what she considered close friends in the community, yet her presence in the town always attracted a subdued attention. She knew that together they were a conspicuous couple because Cron stood a foot taller than she, and as they moved about on their errands, she was conscious of heads turned in surreptitious glances. She hadn't been to town for weeks; perhaps she would notice changes, see new faces, people who didn't know who she was. She contemplated what that would be like. Their visit was planned for the following day.

Early next morning, Olive watched puddles shrinking in the sand as the sun pushed the shadows along the wall of the house. It was a glorious day, the earth washed red and the sky rinsed blue, and she and Cron travelled into Kimberley in the trap. While she went

in search of her books, Cron settled to read the library copy of the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*. When she rejoined him, he handed her a page of the newspaper. 'They're agitating again. Read this.' He pointed to a column headed 'No Tax without Representation.' Putting her books down, she sat beside him and read. She humphed,

'Curious how we can get hot under the collar about those English miners in Johannesburg not being allowed to vote for the Volksraad in Pretoria, but where was the outrage when the natives in Glen Grey found themselves paying a labour tax with no vote.' She pushed the paper aside. 'It's angering, Cron.'

'Yes, it is. Let's go for dinner,' he said.

Entering the hotel, Olive brushed past a woman leaving who reached out and touched her on the arm.

'Hello, Miss Schreiner, it's Ella.' Olive swung her head back.

'Miss Shippard? I didn't recognise you; it's been a while—nice to see you again.' Olive turned to Cron. 'You haven't met Miss Shippard, I think. Ella is from British Bechuanaland. She's also a friend of Mary Sauer's.'

'Pleased to meet you, madam.'

'And this is my husband, Mr Cronwright-Schreiner,' Olive beamed. Cron put his hand on Olive's shoulder to indicate a desire to keep moving.

'If you'll excuse me, I'll leave you ladies chatting, I'm anxious to secure a table before the mid-day rush.'

'Good idea,' said Ella, nodding graciously. When Cron had moved off, she turned to Olive. 'Father will be pleased when I tell him that I've met you and your husband,' she said brightly. Her demeanour suddenly became subdued. Fixing her eyes on Olive, she said wearily, 'I was very sorry to hear about your loss, Miss Schreiner.'

'Yes…' The dots of Olive's hesitation were quickly filled by Ella.

'But you will forget, dear.'

In the pulse of diners that filled the room, Olive pushed her way through searching anxiously for Cron. He was seated in the furthermost corner, reading the menu. As she approached, it was as much as she could do to hold back her tears. Cron stood. 'Olive, what has happened?' He told her to sit down. She dropped into her chair and her eyes watered up and her face twisted as she struggled to contain her anguish. He gave her his handkerchief, and lowered his voice. 'Tell me,' he gently pleaded.

‘That woman, Miss Shippard, said I will forget. No, Cron, never will I forget my baby, not so long as there is life in me.’

Dr Ashe had said baby’s lungs had not opened properly but Olive knew she would always doubt the diagnosis and wonder if nurse had rolled on the child in her sleep. And in the seconds before a more generous thought surfaced, the question mark against her own husband’s vigilance in those precious hours while her baby had lived. Alice’s reply from England hadn’t helped. She said that a baby that had gone full term shouldn’t have died. Olive blew her nose and wiped her eyes and when she looked up at Cron her heart plummeted and she admonished herself for allowing such thoughts. His eyes had turned watery and red. In sympathy and in his own sadness, he said, ‘No, we shan’t ever forget her.’ It was a reminder to Olive how deep the pain of their loss had cut. Pulling herself together, she reached across the starched linen cloth and with her hand sought Cron’s to comfort and be comforted.

‘People do mean well,’ she said.

PART THREE

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

August 1895

Cron's best man and friend from Bedford, Charles Webber, arrived at the Homestead. He had come to support Cron in the address he was to give at the Kimberley Town Hall. Olive was glad of Charles' company and his championing of Cron. Though she had only met Charles Webber once before—on her wedding day—this seemed to have cemented between them an affection from having been participants to a significant event. She liked Charles much; she liked his red hair, his big smile, his politeness, and his rumpled appearance. He was a man who had no wife to instruct him on how he should dress or no betrothed to impress, and yet she saw in Charles Webber a deeply sensitive nature and someone who seemed to enjoy her company as much as he did Cron's.

To his audience of two, Cron rehearsed, reading aloud 'The Political Situation'. She and Charles would play Devil's advocate, Olive said, prepare him for any challenges he might face on the night. When he reached his own crafted section on scab disease and the government's failure to address it, he read with gusto. Charles put his big hands together. 'Bravo, bravo!' He asked, 'Who is going to chair the meeting?'

'A politician, Richard Soloman, sits as an independent for Kimberley. He won't agree with Olive on the Native Question; he is strongly anti-native, but it's not his job to take sides,' said Cron. Olive took a cigarette from its case, and leaning across from the sofa, offered one to Charles. He declined and withdrew his pipe from his coat pocket offering Olive a light.

As the smoke curled, she said, 'Dick's alright, he's a friend of my brother. Will and Dick go back to Cambridge days. They've been shadowing each other; both of them qualified for the Bar and now they sit in the Parliament together.' Drawing smoke into her lungs, she reflected on these men of her generation. Wistfully, she thought how different were they from the first generation of Cape parliamentarians, among them Betty's father, Mr Molteno, and Dick's uncle, Mr Saul Solomon. These were generous men who had argued strongly for the inclusion of the native in the affairs of state when self-government was proclaimed in the Colony. And they had won.

On the evening of Cron's address, Olive made sure his shoes were polished and his coat was brushed clean. And she gave instructions to Charles to ask leading questions in support of the ideas expressed by the speaker. As she was to learn later that evening, the event was well attended and had proceeded in an orderly manner, but there had been flutterings in the hall, less for the paper's condemnation of the 'retrogressive' legislation on the Native Question, than for its thinly veiled accusation that the Afrikander Bond had been manipulated by Rhodes to further his wealth interests. Without pointing the finger directly at him, Olive had shrewdly used terms such as 'the monopolists', 'the aliens', 'the great mining amalgamators', 'the speculators'.

Returned to the Homestead, Cron and Charles settled for a whiskey in preference to a cocoa and while the liquor emboldened Charles, it had the opposite effect on Cron who collapsed on the sofa. Olive curled up in her arm chair. Charles was standing, warming himself in front of the fire. He said, 'Cron read with great passion, you would have been proud of him.' He spun on his heels and sweeping his arms in a wide circle, brought forth his best oratorical voice. 'This alien Monopolist sweeps bare the virgin land before him like the locust; and, like the locust, leaves nothing for his successors but the barren earth.' Olive chuckled.

'Yes, I rather liked that line myself.'

'Pure poetry,' said Charles, dazzling her with his huge smile.

She felt proud of her paper, it wasn't all railing against the monopolist but a clarion call for a just and stable future South Africa. Olive had heard about the process begun in Australia, for the colonies of that land to unite as one nation, and the idea had greatly appealed to her, but this could only be achieved in South Africa, she argued in the paper, if each party understood the needs of the other through peaceful dialogue and negotiation. She looked to Cron who was spread eagled, his arm dangling, his boots, collar and cuffs lying in a heap on the floor beside the sofa.

'Did the audience understand our ideas of confederation?' she pressed. He seemed barely able to keep his eyes open. He motioned to Charles.

'Tell her, will you dear chap? Right now, my memory of it is all a bit of a blur.'

Olive interjected.

'Oh, dear boy, you do look worn out. Perhaps we should leave that discussion until the morning and we can pick over the bones at breakfast. We have put it in the public arena now, no taking it back. Well done to both of you,' she said, moving to pick up Cron's clothes, the detritus of a challenging night.

Olive's authorship of their polemical essay was revealed when she was forced to write a letter to the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* in defence of her husband who had been accused by its editor of failing to declare his wife's involvement. She followed this with a hurried despatch of 'The Political Situation' to three Cape Town news outlets: the *Cape Times,* the *Argus* and the *Telegraph.* The latter paper was the organ of the Parliamentary liberals and, she believed, would be the more likely to publish the essay. But she was to be disappointed. Its editor was Mr John Merriman, and in his leader, entitled 'The Eternal Petticoat', he said it was wrong of women to interest themselves in public matters and that the female influence on politics was not welcomed. The *Argus,* too, refused to publish Olive's paper, which didn't surprise her given that Rhodes was a substantial shareholder of that daily. In any event, she didn't think much of a newspaper that interspersed articles from Europe with accounts of Mr Rhodes' bedroom furniture. She heard nothing from the *Cape Times.*

With these disappointments in the local response, Olive did the next best thing and posted her polemic to her publishers in England. WT Stead had recently published his own polemic, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, an essay about moral corruption in America, and Olive told him, 'We want an *If Christ Came to South Africa* from your pen!' Feeling energised and cross in equal measure, she sent letters to all of the men and women she knew would sympathise with her position. She berated Ed Carpenter. 'It's really too bad you English should send out your bloated millionaires to eat us up! And the English people backing them and calling it 'extending the Empire'!'

By September, Olive felt sufficiently disturbed by brewing hostility towards the South African Republic of the Transvaal, and again turned her attention to her projected series of essays about South Africa and its peoples. She had begun months ago to think about the missing piece, but writing it out had been left aside for the more pressing political narrative now looking for a publisher in England. She felt impelled to use her writing as a means to understanding, and her characterisation of the Dutch Boer in her earlier essays were drawn for no other reason than this. It was that peculiarly distinctive characteristic or set of characteristics of a race that she wanted to impart to her readers. She also wanted it understood that her sketches were from a personal perspective, from a keen observer, she was writing as an essayist. Now, she wanted to write about 'The Englishman', the race that formed the other part of the puzzle she had defined in her very first essay as 'the South

African Problem'. While her intent was no different from those earlier essays, circumstances were. She felt a growing urgency to have this essay on the Englishman written out and in the public domain.

Cron went into town, leaving her to her scribbling. Sometimes he went in his whites to play cricket or tennis. Today, it was cricket. Olive forgave him these absences, indeed, encouraged it. He was a sociable fellow and valued sports at which, he was fond of telling her, he had excelled in his school days. She also recognised Cron's need to be engaged with the local Kimberley community. Besides, his regular visits to town were useful, for he posted her letters, collected their mail, and brought home groceries and news. Closed off in her study, she began work and was soon writing at a steady pace.

The English value Freedom as of individual right. Probably no country in the world today gives more scope for individual action, but more than this alone, the characteristic peculiar to the race is their sense of superiority... the Englishman holds to the belief that it is his duty to instruct the savage and other races on this very same value. He sees himself as a Nineteenth Century man while in his mind, the Boer lives in the Seventeenth Century, and the native in the primeval.

Olive was in full flight, her pen unstoppable… *The Englishman says; 'It is my duty to interfere, I can't let these poor benighted people go on so! Yet, he will kill ten thousand to save the few'. '... but, he will say nothing of the coal mines he wishes to work in their country or the rich nature of their lands of which he has already got vast grants.' ''Duty, right, justice'' are blasphemed words, brought in by the English woman to soothe her own soul.*

She stopped, rested her pen and shook her wrist. She read through the script with a critical eye as if standing back or above, and saw that she had drifted into the realm of polemics. She chastised herself for her laziness. She had to get the emotion out of her writing; she wanted this work to be respectable for its scientific quality, and she wanted it widely read. She told herself that she must be an objective observer; such a work required evidence, only then could she present her case. In the mercurial sphere of social life, the best evidence, she knew, came from comparison. Her essay on the Englishman needed a broader sweep of the history of nations and the growth of civilization. Look first for universal truths and then the particular, she reminded herself. She picked up her pen and set about contrasting the English idea of empire with that of the ancient Romans. She would remind her readers that it was the Egyptians and the Semites to whom European (and English) man owed who they are today. Penning her way through these historical

truths, the essential problem facing her country—namely racial prejudice—remained at the forfront of her mind. It was a prejudice not of white against black that was her priority now, but English against Dutch.

Voices were clamouring. Every newspaper that Cron brought home carried in its leader and its letters, a criticism of the Transvaal government for its alleged mistreatment of Englishmen within its borders. Some letters to the papers were openly hostile, she thought verging on jingoism. The intent of her essay then, must be to show how peoples of a country could be brought together in a lasting and uplifting union. She lifted her pen. *A nation grows, it cannot be manufactured*. To illustrate, she summoned up the Irish Question. That country, she wrote,... *hangs at England's side like a dislocated arm, almost as ready to drop off as when four hundred years before, Oliver Cromwell tried to plaster it on with blood and sword.*

Cron returned from the Cricket Club and Olive went out to greet him. His arm was hanging in a calico sling and she guffawed.

'Oh, man, what have you done to yourself!' She knew by the set of his face she had offended him.

'I wish I could laugh about it,' he said.

'I wasn't laughing at you, dear, but I've just been writing about dislocated arms and then you walk in the door with this!' Her explanation seemed to fall flat and she regretted her mirth.

'How did it happen?' she said, moving to touch his arm nestled in its shroud. He pulled away.

'Bowling. It's alright, I've put the shoulder back in its socket.'

'You put it back yourself? Did no doctor attend on you?'

'I don't need a doctor,' he scowled. Olive knew Cron well enough to accept that it was the truth, that apart from a tender shoulder and a hurt pride, his injury was not serious, and when she brought in their tea she saw by his frown he was still brooding. He looked at her resentfully.

'Who have you put in an arm sling?'

'Ireland.'

He reached for his mug of tea with his one good arm and proffered nothing further. She asked him about the cricket, which side had won. His side had won the match, he

said, despite his having to leave the field, and the men had rounded off their win with a celebration in the Club House.

'And when the celebrations are over, what do the men talk about?' she asked.

'Today?' His eyes glinted. 'I'm glad you weren't there. The consensus seems to be in accord with those of *The Advertiser.* Most fellows think it an outrage that Englishmen working the gold mines in Johannesburg are required to pay taxes to Pretoria without voting rights.'

To hear it repeated by Cron fired Olive up, and she responded angrily. 'They can have it! They have only to renounce their English citizenship and President Kruger will give it them.' Cron looked startled.

'Sometimes, Olive, you sound more like a Boer than an Englishwoman.'

She reddened. She wondered how Cron could say such a thing after all they had shared. She rested her cup in its saucer and stood as if to go, putting her hand on her hip she turned and stared at him.

'I'm a South African, and so are you. President Kruger has got a sight more sense than our government. These alien gold miners who make money from the Transvaal mines should be taxed.' She began to walk away but swung around. 'And another thing, just because you don't care for the Cape Afrikaners and their Bond party is no reason to turn against Kruger's Boer Republic.' She marched off back to her study, slammed the door and leant against it. She felt the house fall silent as if it were holding its breath. She stayed a long time, hoping he would come. He didn't.

Sitting at her desk, she tried to concentrate on her essay but her mind wandered. It only needs time, she thought, when union will come to South Africa, organically and peacefully. Already, there had been a great mingling of the races. She thought of her South African friends who, Boer and English, had blended their blood so that the next generation will be South African first, and Dutch or English second. It occurred to her that such mingling had been shown to produce children of rare intelligence and vitality. She thought of America's two most celebrated literary men—Bret Harte and Walt Whitman—both of Dutch and English descent. She thought of Will and his wife, Fan, and their children who in the fullness of time would be sent to England to further their education. Her mind wandered to Matjesfontein. How happy she had been there in that little community of a dozen people. She took a leaf of paper from her folder and set to writing to her old friends, Dr and Mrs John Brown of Burnley. She thought fondly of the Browns who had been a great inspiration to her when as a young woman new to England, they had

read encouragingly her manuscript and had opened doors for her to show it to Chapman, the publisher, who in turn showed it to his reader, George Meredith. *The Story of an African Farm* changed her life in ways unimaginable…including, she thought with a repressed smile, getting her an intemperate husband.

When the sun dropped and long shadows began to creep across the plain and she smelt smoke from the kitchen fire, Olive emerged from her study. Blessing was in the kitchen with Cron who was directing the boy in the cracking of eggs. She saw a tomato salad had been prepared and a place for two set at the kitchen bench. Cron looked up. 'Omelette alright for you?' She came in close behind him, being careful not to touch his arm, and linked hers around his waist. She nuzzled her chin into the hollow of his back.

'We are one, aren't we?'

That night, Cron allowed Olive to help him wash and settle him in bed.

He said, 'When you've finished writing your essay, I think we should give ourselves a holiday.'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

December 1895

The news of Oscar Wilde's imprisonment reached them just days before their planned departure for Port Alfred and the Kowie. Olive was outside standing in the shade of the stable door, reading the thermometer that hung on the slatted wall. The temperature had reached 102 degrees in the shade. Waves of heat slid off the galvanised iron roof of the house. Blessing had taken the mare to the water trough and Cron was positioning the vehicle inside the stable. When he joined her, she saw pearls of sweat had formed on his forehead and soaked into the band of his hat. He handed her the newspaper, removed his hat and wiped his face with his handkerchief. They walked across to the kitchen. Cron poured them a glass of cool water and Olive settled herself on a bench stool and opened the newpaper.

'Oh, dear God, they've got him!' She exclaimed. She had been following Mr Wilde's trial through the sketchy news reports that filtered through from the Old Bailey to the southern hemisphere. She read quickly through the text. 'It's not right is it, that a man can be sent down for loving another human being?' Cron leant over her shoulder to read.

'A two-year sentence with hard labour, that's tough.'

She said, 'Mr Wilde helped me get my first allegories published. He was editor of *The Women's World* then. I told him I was going to live in the East End for a bit to escape from my many callers, and he said it was the only place where people didn't wear masks upon their faces. He said it was why he lived in the West End because nothing in life interested him except the mask.' She smiled fondly at the memory.

'It's unfortunate for Mr Wilde that he didn't keep himself masked,' said Cron.

Olive imagined the man stripped of his humanity, dressed in prison garb, his brilliant, artistic mind being closed down, shut off from society, and it made her heart ache.

'It will ruin him,' she said.

They left Kimberley on Boxing Day after a quiet Christmas at the Homestead. Blessing was let go with a monetary bonus, and the mare was parked in the town stables. Their journey to the Kowie took them via Port Elizabeth where they were met at the railway

terminus by their hosts for the evening, the teachers from the Collegiate School for Girls, Betty Molteno and Alice Greene.

'I've heard much about you,' Cron said to Betty as they walked together to a waiting Cape cart. She smiled graciously.

'And I've heard so many good things about you.'

'Well, perhaps you shouldn't believe it all,' he said, 'my wife tends to exaggeration.'

It was Olive's first meeting with Betty's partner and she warmed immediately to Miss Greene's open face and delicate English manner.

'You are going to love the Kowie, especially if you like swimming,' said Miss Greene. 'I go there as often as I can.' Over dinner, Olive discovered that she and Miss Greene shared many passions, especially their love of the natural world, and so this was where their conversation took them; swimming, walking, plants and animals, while Cron politely engaged with Betty about her role as headmistress of a girls' school, about the opportunities afforded young women these days and about education more generally. Olive had half an ear to their conversation, while he kept catching Olive's eye, smiling agreeably, and giving her frequent, affectionate pats. She wondered if Cron felt a little overwhelmed, surrounded on all sides by intelligent women.

They arrived on the first day of the New Year at Coles Hotel in Port Alfred. The hotel was nestled on the edge of the Kowie River that flowed like molten silver spreading out across white sands to the Indian ocean. As soon as they had unpacked, Olive changed into her swimsuit and sandals determined that with serious exercise, she could shed the excess pounds that had settled around her middle and buttocks in an insidiously slow and cruel manner.

Sunlight bounced off the distant breakers and the aqua sea rolled lazily into the shore. They lolled about in its shallows and took long walks barefoot on the silt sand. In the late afternoon, they sat in deck chairs on the sloping lawn, and watched a sky pink like a flamingo's wing. She loved the Kowie, she told Cron. 'It reminds me of Alassio on the Riviera.'

On the third day of their stay, after their beach walk, they returned to the hotel to find the other guests clustered in the lounge. Faces turned as they entered and Olive sensed a restlessness among them. It was unnerving. A visitor from England with whom they had chatted at breakfast, broke from the group stepping forward and asked, had they

heard the news? Others in the restive group followed him and soon Olive and Cron were surrounded.

'Have you heard? said a woman in a state of high excitement. 'The Chartered Company forces have entered the Transvaal.'

'What?' said Olive. 'How do you know this?'

'The hotel has received a wire.' Olive felt herself blanch as she and Cron made a beeline for the front desk. 'A force of five hundred armed men apparently, crossed the border of the South African Republic,' the desk clerk reported. Olive turned to Cron,

'Rhodes! He's behind this.' The clerk appeared startled by her accusation, but as Olive's statement was not addressed to him, he said nothing and blandly reached for their room key.

The door closed behind them, and Olive began to pace and wring her hands. 'He believes he can handle the Boers with the same merciless injustice with which he has handled the Matabele. I tell you Cron, he won't get away with it this time, the great man has chosen the path of evil and he will fall.' The maid brought in a pot of tea and Cron poured out two cups.

'I don't think there is much we can do about it right now,' he said. Olive berated herself.

'If only I had finished my essay sooner and got it out there to the public.'

At the pre-prandial gathering of guests in the lounge that evening, Olive openly expressed her views to the others. 'We've seen this coming for months,' she said, feeling it her duty to make others see, too. A women gasped at Olive's suggestion of conspiracy and a husband of one responded indignantly.

'Mrs Schreiner, you are mistaken in your belief. Mr Rhodes is our Premier. A statesman of his standing would never entertain such a wild idea.' Olive stared at him coldly. An animated conversation ensued, and the visitor from England sat by quietly listening to the exchanges, a bemused expression on his face.

'And who is managing director of the Chartered Company, I beg you?' Olive asked.

'It's that fellow Jameson run amok. But y'know, dear lady, the English residents of Johannesburg are at their wits end, old Kruger refuses to give them political representation.' It seemed to Olive that these people with whom she was mingling considered this reason enough to take up arms against the Republic.

'If they are prepared to surrender their British citizenship, President Kruger will give it them,' she said frostily. There was a ripple of disquiet among the guests and Olive reminded herself that she was in the Cape Colony's Eastern Province, on the land settled by Stakesby-Lewis' ancestors—England's poor who had themselves struggled for a political voice in the home country before fleeing like refugees to a land that promised a better life.

'No vote, no tax!' said the gentleman thumping his trousered leg. Olive was about to remind the present company of the impact of the Glen Grey Act on the natives, when Cron interjected.

'My good man, doesn't it strike you as odd that the men of the Chartered Company force coming from Rhodesia have invaded a friendly state in the name of voters' rights, while they themselves remain voteless?' Olive beamed at Cron thinking him terribly clever to put forward an irrefutable argument so calmly, and she felt smugly satisfied that they had won the debate. She would write to Seymour Fort, he would know how the settlers in the north felt about living under Company rule. Suddenly, she had an image of Seymour Fort, mounted and riding at break-neck speed, and was struck by a disquieting thought.

The dinner bell rang just as the hotel receptionist appeared in the open doorway in an agitated state. More news had trickled through, he said. 'It seems the raid into the Transvaal has been thwarted, and Dr Jameson arrested.' Olive clapped her hands loudly.

'Well, this is glorious news,' she said, standing in defiant mood. Cron stood too, and begging the pardon of their fellow guests, he led her by the arm into the dining room.

In the days following, feelings of exhilaration that the invaders had been routed, were replaced by feelings of anxiety that Doctor Jameson's arrest might trigger anti-Dutch propaganda in the Cape and beyond. Cron drafted letters for the Colony's newspapers, the *Cape Times* and *Ons Land*—the mouthpiece of the Afrikander Bond—declaring his support for the Afrikaners in the Cape and for the Boer Republic of the Transvaal. In the letters, he expressed admiration for President Kruger and his burghers in defeating the capitalists. He read his letters to Olive. She thought it a remarkable turnaround for Cron who had long been hostile to the Bond for its support of Rhodes' retrogressive legislation in the Parliament.

Olive wrote letters to family and friends in Cape Town seeking information on what had been the reaction there to the raid. To her brother Will, she was direct. 'If there

is to be peace between Dutch and English in this country, two things must happen. Rhodes must depart from public life, and the Company Charter revoked.' She knew Will had no power to act against the South Africa Company, that would be a matter for the Crown but, as Attorney General in the Cape government, he could write to the Colonial Secretary and he could certainly act against Rhodes in the Parliament, even if it meant resigning himself. To her London friends, she wrote gloatingly. To WT Stead, she wrote 'What say you to this murderous attack on the Transvaal by the Chartered forces?' Softening her tone, she congratulated her journalist friend for the 'splendid' likeness of himself he had included in his last letter to her. His portrait was, she said, as she liked to remember him, leaning back on his swivel chair, his booted feet resting on his desk, as he had sat one day in her room in Kensington. Stead was a vain man, she knew.

Hotel guests nodded with cool politeness when passing Olive and Cron in corridors and guest lounges, but none, with the exception of the visitor from England, seemed willing to engage either of them in conversation. This didn't unduly bother her. She had experienced wariness, even subliminal hostility towards her before for her views, and her fearless will to speak them. She was not like other women in this country, to their eyes, she knew, she was strange and threatening.

On days when the ocean was stirred by the winds and crashed to the shore and seagulls shrieked in their wake, Cron and Olive bathed in the shallows of the estuary, the ebb and flow of the tide pulling them along. And they took long walks on the foreshore.

'Thanks for bringing me to the Kowie,' she said. 'It's the only place in South Africa that's as sweet as my Alassio. I want to take you to Italy when we go home.' He gave her a long sideways glance with an expression she had grown uncomfortably to know.

'I doubt we'll be able to go further than England, unless I can find a way to bolster our finances,' he said, strolling on ahead while she stooped to pick up a sea-shell.

'Cron, come here and look at this.' He turned and retraced his steps back across the watery sand. Olive knew they were stony broke and she also knew she was running out of time. Two years was what she had promised him was all she needed to get the next big novel finished and then, she had said gaily, they would be rolling in royalties. Now, she tried to hide her shame in something beautiful, a marine mollusc, a cowrie shell, its shiny porcelain surface smooth to her touch. 'Spotted like a leopard,' she said, holding it out to him. 'For you.'

They left the Kowie on the fifteenth day of January. Olive had promised her mother a visit when the train stopped at Grahamstown, and Cron wanted to show Olive his childhood home. They booked a two-night stay at the Railway Hotel. The circumstance of her last stay at the Railway seemed to Olive, an eternity ago. Yet entering their room—perhaps it was the very same—she could still conjure up the sadness and the heart-ache she had felt when Cron had left early without saying goodbye. How she had fretted about him. To have him with her now, in body and soul, gave her a warm glow, and she put the ghosts of her troubled past behind her.

She went alone to see her mother, and found Rebecca in the lounge of the Assumptionist convent sitting quietly alone. Her lace fichu was settled on her shoulders and her hands folded neatly on her lap. A slick of light pushed through curtains closed against the sun, tracing across the polished wood floor to the doorway where Olive stood. The old lady looked up but she didn't smile. Had her mother not recognised her in the gloom, she wondered, or was it as she feared, her mother had learnt of the disaster that had befallen the Cape Government. 'Mothie? It's your little Olive.'

'Yes, I can see you and I'm glad you've come.' Olive knew at once by the sternness in Rebecca's voice her mother was agitated. She walked across the room and kissed the soft, wrinkled cheek.

'You look well, Mother. Now, aren't you going to tell me how well I look? Cron and I have had two glorious weeks at the Kowie and we feel like different people.' Her attempt to be cheery didn't work so she sat down, covering her mother's hand with her own. Rebecca withdrew it in an angry twist of her body.

'I'm not well, Olive. I've been worried to death about this nasty business in the Transvaal. People are making terrible accusations that Mr Rhodes and William are implicated; saying that it was they who sent Jameson.'

'Well, we know it isn't true, Mother. William would never have conspired to raid a sovereign territory.'

'Are they going to hang them? If they hang Jameson, then William is in grave danger.'

'No, Mother. Will has broken with Rhodes and may even replace him as Prime Minister.' The old lady looked aghast at her daughter, and Olive immediately regretted the words that had spilled out; words formulated from nothing other than wishful thinking. She hadn't heard from her brother and didn't know where Will stood on the matter.

‘You are wrong, Olive. William is heart and soul with Mr Rhodes.’ She simpered, ‘Mr Rhodes wrote me a letter just days before this nasty business erupted.’

‘Did he? May I read it?’ Rebecca lifted a papery hand, pointing to her draw-string bag that rested on the small table.

‘Read it aloud, dear. I would like to hear the man’s kind words again. But he asks that I not share it with your brother, so you must give me your word, Olive, that you say nothing of it to William.’

Olive opened out the letter, noting its date:

> *Dear Madam, I ask you to remember I have tried always to do my best for the country of my adoption. The future has trouble in store but time will right everything, for it is only time that tells the truth. I am very fond of your son. He is to me the most straight-forward and honourable man that I have ever met and I know he must owe a great deal to his Mother. Put my letter away and do not let him know I have written…*

The letter had been composed on the day Jameson started his mad dash to the Transvaal border.

Olive returned to the Railway hotel, hot and exhausted. She found Cron resting in their room with his feet up. ‘I’m only just returned myself. How was the little mother?’ he said.

Throwing off her hat, she flopped on the bed beside him.

‘She’s quite off her head. Thinks that Will is going to the gallows!’

‘Oh, dear. Let’s go and eat and you can tell me about it at table.’

Olive told Cron about her mother’s feelings towards Rhodes and of her distress at what people were saying. She was tempted to share news of Rhodes’ letter to her mother with Cron, but it would be breaking a confidence, and she would never be forgiven.

Moving the conversation to more pleasant matters, Cron said, ‘I’ve wired Charles the time of our arrival.’

It was on Webber’s visit to Kimberley the previous year, Olive had mentioned governessing on the farm at Lelie Kloof in her youth, and Charles had said it was a morning’s ride across the mountain from his farm, and urged them to pay a visit.

The waiter arrived and Cron ordered the roast dinner and Olive asked for soda water and crackers.

‘You’re not eating, Olive. Are you alright?’ said Cron

‘It’s this oppressive weather, puts me off my food.’ Olive hadn’t wanted to raise false hope before having what she suspected confirmed.

‘It could be morning sickness.’

He faulted. ‘Oh. How long have you known this?’

‘I don’t know, but I’ll see a doctor when we return to Kimberley.’ Cron’s meal arrived and it was, she thought, with a studied indifference that he shifted the conversation back onto himself, and the Farmers Association.

She tried to stay focussed on what Cron was saying, but Rhodes’ words to her mother whirled in her head. In reading the man’s letter, she had sensed something familiar. It was as though he was seeking a kind of absolution, not from her this time but from Rebecca for the crime he was about to commit. A less generous thought surfaced. Perhaps Rhodes was ingratiating himself with the little woman, abusing her trust, for fear that Will might turn against him. Munching on her crackers with one distracted ear on Cron’s business, her thoughts wandered to an incident in Kimberley just weeks before her marriage when she returned there from the Taung’s camp on the Hart River. She booked a room at the Victoria hotel where she had arranged to meet Will, who was visiting country electorates with Rhodes. They all three sat together in the drawing room and she attacked both men on the Strop Bill and Native issues more broadly, and as soon as Will went out to fetch his hat, Rhodes turned to her and said she must not think he agreed with Will, that his sympathies were all with her on the Native Question. How he had cottoned up to her, she thought with derision, but she had been quick to see through him.

‘Olive?’ Cron was speaking again. ‘Are you up for visiting the old house?’

They couldn’t enter the private dwelling on the corner of Bartholomew Street, but the once Cronwright family home was in full view from where they now stood on the opposite corner. With its stone walls abutting the road, she thought it a substantial house and Cron pointed out its various rooms shuttered against the street, including where he and his brothers had slept. She asked questions about the father-in-law she had never known.

‘He started his working life as a farmer, but after a succession of droughts he moved the family into Grahamstown when I was a small boy. He bought a tanning and saddlery business.’ She smiled. Now she understood Cron’s fastidiousness with saddles. He continued. ‘Father succeeded in the business, and was soon being courted by the local community to represent them. He stood first as Town mayor and then as a Cape parliamentarian which took him away from home for long stretches. He handed

management of the business to someone he thought he could trust. It was a mistake. The business was run down and our family lost a lot of money.' Cron turned to her.

'I've told you this before, haven't I?'

'You said you wanted to go to Cambridge but there weren't sufficient finances so you had to leave college and find work. You've never told me the reason.' Olive slipped her hand into Cron's and gazed up at the window of his boyhood dreams.

'It's a terrible thing to have your dreams thwarted so. Did the manager steal from your father?'

'Father took him to court, but Gau fought tooth and nail. It was a difficult thing to prove.' Olive started and dropped her hand.

'Who was he?'

'Fellow by the name of Gau, Julius Gau.' Olive's knees buckled and she heard her voice quiver as she asked,

'Does he still live in Grahamstown, this Mr Gau?'

'The last I heard he was in Johannesburg, probably chasing another gold mine.'

On the train, Cron contented himself with reading while Olive gazed out at the bleached earth running by. She was unusually withdrawn and Cron commented on this. She mumbled something about her mother, but she couldn't shake Julius Gau from her mind, and while she had tried to read the book that lay open on her lap, the man's face kept intruding. Through the glass pane of the carriage window she saw his porcine eyes looking back at her, and she shuddered. The deprivation that Cron had suffered by his father's financial ruin, was too terrible. Mr Gau, she realised, was a man of cajolery and greed. He had sullied her youth and he had robbed her husband of his and yet, she thought with heavy irony, in the strange twists and turns of life, he had brought her and Cron together. Would she ever have met her husband otherwise?

Charles Webber was waiting on the platform when they alighted at the Cooktown siding, his hair ablaze from the sun at his back as it melted into the horizon. He waved to them, and Olive raised her hand as Charles lumbered towards them. There was something soothing in this reunion with their friend, to have the distractions offered by a communion of three instead of two, she thought. 'How was the Kowie?' he said, effortlessly picking up their case.

With the new uncertainty about Olive's condition, Cron had thought it unwise of her to attempt the planned ride next day but she insisted. 'Until I can see a doctor, I cannot

say with certainty that I'm pregnant.' She pleaded. 'It's been fifteen years since I have seen Lelie Kloof, Cron. It will mean so much to me to go there.' So, on the first day of February, the horses were harnessed, victuals and water canisters were packed in saddle-bags, and the friends set off for their ride across the mountains. The horse Charles offered Olive was fresh and frisky, the side-saddle stiff from lack of use but after making some adjustments and softening it with tallow, Cron had passed inspection. Olive felt comfortable and the animal settled to its rider's commands.

When they reached their destination, they found the old house at Lelie Kloof still standing but abandoned. Olive walked about looking at everything. She told Cron and Charles about the huge fossil that she remembered in the krantz, but they couldn't find it. Cron found a small white fossil embedded in the blue shale of the river-bed and they gathered around. Olive said she thought it looked like a sea horse but couldn't believe that the sea had ever been this far inland. Charles leant over with his magnifying glass and Cron chipped at the shale with his knife, loosening the fossil from its sarcophagus. Out of the water, the petrified creature seemed smaller.

'We'll send it to Billy,' he said.

'Billy is our nephew, Will's eldest boy,' Olive explained.

Picking their way back through the mountains and down through the Baviaans River Valley, they stopped at the cave where, in 1815, a Dutch rebel from the infamous Slachters Nek had hidden from the authorities. She saw the pockmarked holes where the bullets had ricocheted off the stone entrance prior to his capture and execution. Cron and Charles argued about the detail of the story, but they agreed it was the beginning of Afrikaner struggle against British Colonial rule. When they reached the foot of the mountain and the open grassland of the plain, the men were eager for a gallop and after consultations with Olive, they set off. She fell in behind, doing her utmost to keep pace with them, the exhilaration of speed and wind rushing at her face, the heaviness of the earth underfoot. But they outpaced her and in fear of losing control of her mount, she pulled too hard on the reins. The animal jolted its head up at the suddenness of her hand movement, and bucked and threw her down with force on the saddle. She heard a crack.

That night, Olive awoke to dragging pains in her belly and moaned. Cron helped her to the wash room where she stayed groaning and holding herself, urging him to go back to bed, and when the eerie grey of morning crept under the wash room door, she made a dash for the water closet. It felt as though her insides were coming away as blood

gushed. She splashed buckets of water into the basin and emerged from the closet light headed and unsteady on her feet. She noticed splotches of purple on her dressing gown. The sun was already casting its purple glow across the landscape when she entered the kitchen. The men were already sitting at the table, and looked up, concern etched on their faces.

Charles suggested they stay an extra few days to allow Olive time to recover her strength. In the privacy of her room with her head in the pillow, she sobbed.

'I'm so sorry, Cron.'

'I know,' he said with weary forbearance. 'I know.'

The day of their departure from the farm, Charles presented Olive with a gift.

'He's the runt of the litter,' he said, handing her a tiny puppy. Olive almost cried at Charles' kind and caring heart. Learning the puppy's sex, Olive didn't hesitate over a name. She wrapped Mill in a rug and nursed him like a baby on the train journey home, the tyke's ears sticking up above the blanket like two antennae.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

March 1896

A mountain of mail awaited them at Kimberly. Olive chose to open first that which had come from her sister, Ettie. She was eager to share with Ettie news of the Kowie, of the little mother, and to discuss the personal matter of her recent miscarriage, but as she read her sister's missive, full of invective and accusations, Olive felt her lungs squeezed. Ettie's condemnation of her seemed to have arisen from what she believed was Olive's vindictiveness against Mr Rhodes. And worse, in saying things about the man to their mother, said Ettie, Olive had upset the old woman dreadfully. The final hurt was to read her sister's claim that it was Cron who was to blame for Olive's changed attitude to Mr Rhodes. Her husband, Ettie accused, had turned Olive against the Premier.

Cron, too, had been assailed, but this from a complete stranger. A townsperson had sent him a cutting from the *Wynberg Times*. The paper's columnist had taken exception to Cron's letter to *Ons Land*, charging him with having adopted his wife's ideas about Mr Rhodes. 'Seems we can't win,' he said, scowling. 'We have corrupted each other!'

'Feeling must be running hot in the Cape,' she said. 'As to Ettie, I don't know how my own sister could be so cruel. She and Theo are thick as thieves that much I know, and Theo has always been a staunch supporter of Rhodes, especially since the man stepped in to pay for young Willie's education.' Theo had taken in their grand-nephew and his mother—Olive and Theo's niece—when the boy's father died of typhoid. A memory of the boy flashed on Olive. It was during one of her visits to Groote Schuur in the heady summer of her friendship with the Premier. She had found Willie running about the place, he must have been about eight years old, and Katie arriving to take her son home. Katie said that Mr Rhodes liked to have children about, and Olive asked Willie what he liked in the big house and the boy replied, 'I don't like the green marble bath. It's cold sitting down.' His mother had laughed.

Olive shielded Cron from the most hurtful insults of Ettie's letter and later, she shielded him from the flow of accusing letters from her mother that started arriving at the Homestead. 'Cron is warping your mind and degrading your character,' Rebecca wrote. In another letter, she blamed Cron for Olive's miscarriage. 'Oh, Mother, Mother,' Olive cried as she read, remembering the woman's high opinion of Cron after their first meeting.

‘I like him much…he has markedly the noble stamp of individuality,’ she had written to her daughter.

In her despair, Olive sat at her desk and scrawled an embittered letter to Mary. Then she balled it and threw it in the bin, thinking it wrong to burden her friend with her woes. Mary Sauer, she knew, and her other Cape Town friends—the liberal politicians’ wives—were as one with her in their anxiety about how things might play out in the Government following the disturbing events in the Transvaal. And if Will, who worked with Rhodes and held him in high esteem, did not condemn her for her political views, then why should she allow it that her mother and sister offend her so. No matter how hard she tried to close her mind to their venomous attacks, she could not. The hurt and rejection cut deep and she paced about on the stoep for two sleepless nights, the second night until the grey of dawn when Cron came out and scolded her for making herself ill. She broke, and he took her back to bed and held her close as she sobbed into the sleeve of his night shirt. ‘I’ve only one sister left to me in this world, and she has deserted me. To whom can I now turn, Cron? I’ve no one.’

Olive was washing pots in the kitchen when she heard someone moving about outside the house. She was alone, Cron had left early for town taking Blessing with him. Mill was inside the house and started barking at the intruder. Then she caught sight of him as he walked passed the shuttered window. She moved to the kitchen door. ‘Mr Rose-Innes! Oh, dear. You’ve caught me looking like a fisher woman, my servant has gone into town with Cron.’

He gave a cautious laugh. ‘As I was passing through Kimberley, Jesse said I must call on you.’

‘I’m very glad you’ve come. I understand you’ve been in Johannesburg attending the trial of the accused?’ Rose-Innes, though fair of head and shorter than Cron, reminded Olive of her husband with his serious smile and quiet confidence. She invited him into the house. He removed his hat. She took Mill by the scruff of his little neck to drag him outside, and her guest bent down and patted the dog whose tail was now wagging.

‘Well, you’re an excellent guard dog,’ he said, with a throaty laugh. Rose-Innes flipped his coat tails and sat on the sofa. Olive made them tea, and said she wanted to hear all about the trial.

‘I’ve been a witness and reporter for the High Commissioner,’ he said. ‘And acted as legal attendant at negotiations with President Kruger in Pretoria. Now, there’s a man of

perspicacity. He has handed Jameson and the other leaders of the raid over to British justice. They're being sent to London for trial.' Olive was perplexed and a little disappointed at this news.

'Would we do the same if the boot were on the other foot?' Rose-Innes answered her, she thought, with the authority of a man trained in the law yet with an appreciation of *real politik.*

'President Kruger has solved a dangerous problem in a manner of a skilled diplomat; it should greatly enhance his prestige. But, I will tell you, Mrs Schreiner, that most Dutch don't see it this way. They believe that England was behind the raid. I've heard some burghers say '*dis die Britte.''*

Olive and Rose-Innes talked for an uninterrupted hour about the raid and its aftermath, and about the care-taker administration in Cape Town following Rhodes' resignation as prime minister, though he had not resigned his seat. And they spoke of the the Afrikander Bond and its leader who had retired himself altogether from the Parliament. Mr Rose-Innes finished his tea, and as his cab was waiting, he thanked her for her hospitality, and in bidding him goodbye, she felt newly energised in thought and conviction.

Cron brought home a month-old copy of *The Times* of London. It reported the Poet Laureate, Alfred Austin, had written a song in defence of 'Doctor Jim' imprisoned in a Pretoria gaol. Other poets and British conservatives added to the outrage at Jameson's arrest with expressions of sympathy for the raiders and condemnation at the Republic's actions in detaining them.

'Alfred Austin!' exclaimed Olive. 'He is the worst and least read poet in English history, however did he receive the Queen's honour?'

'It's not worthy of speculation,' said Cron. 'Perhaps Mr Rose-Innes was correct in his view. Paul Kruger, by his actions, has taken the wind out of their sails.' Olive wasn't so sure, she found the whole business of the raid and the jingoistic sentiments it had aroused on both sides, distressing.

Later that same week, she received from Jesse Rose-Innes a cutting taken from the *South African Telegraph* in which the editor accused the Chartered Company of supplying men and artillery for the Raid. 'Oh my, come and read this!' she called to Cron who was out on the veranda lathering soap onto his cheeks. 'They claim De Beers is in on it, running guns for the Chartered Company!' Cron was passing a razor along his chin and

turned and the razor nicked his skin. His brows knitted and she heard him utter a profanity under his breath.

'Who's 'they'?' he said.

'*The Telegraph,* Mrs Rose-Innes sent it me. Honestly, if it hadn't been for this paper we wouldn't know about any of it.' She watched Cron dab at his chin. His braces hung down loose over his trousers and his singlet, damp from water and sweat, clung to his chest. His arm muscles flexed as he lifted the razor to finish the job he had begun. Watching him, Olive recalled how she had once described her husband to Ed Carpenter. *He is uncivilised and all things nice!*

'Let me finish here and I'll read it,' he said.

Out in the yard, Blessing was throwing sticks for the little dog. She was surprised how much Mill had grown in the few weeks they had had him. She went out and Mill came bounding on spindly legs towards her. Olive sat on the edge of the stoep and ruffled his ears and he licked her toes.

In these weeks following her return from the Kowie, Olive opened a new line of communication with a man who, it seemed, had turned full circle in his attitude to her and her writing—the politician, Mr John Merriman. He wrote, in the first instance, to congratulate her on her *Stray Thoughts* essay on 'The Boer', an extract of which had recently appeared in the *Cape Times.* 'It is the vibrancy of the work that attracts me,' he said, but he wanted to know why the Boer was more hidebound than the Welsh or the Basques? But his was not simply a letter of felicitations; Merriman had invited Olive into his confidence. He was preparing a motion to put before the Parliament, he said. It would call for the revocation of the British South Africa Company's Charter. Merriman, it seemed to Olive, had shrugged off conventional ideas about a woman's place, no easy thing for a conservative man such as he, she thought. She replied immediately, offering advice and encouragement and was effuse in her flattery. She urged the liberal politician to seize a ministerial portfolio in the spill that had followed Rhodes resignation from the Premiership. 'The future of South Africa needs straight strong men in the government…if I could do anything by writing home, let me know.'

She answered his question about the Boer; why they were more 'hidebound' than the Welsh or the Basques: 'These latter countries were complete little nations', she wrote, 'cut vertically' from King and Baron down, having representatives from all classes, whereas the Boer was a section of a nation, 'cut horizontally', representing only the

labouring and lower middle class.' It was, she suggested, analogous to English Colonial life. 'We are not a section of the English people cut vertically, from aristocrat and cultured intellectual to peasant and working poor. It is the dissenting lower middle-class, with its peculiar virtues and vices that predominates I n South African English life.' She doubted Merriman would warm to her characterisation of his colonial brothers and would certainly see himself as above her depiction.

Will, too, sent congratulations on her essay's publication. He wrote: 'I have enclosed a copy of the latest issue of *Ons Land*. You may wish to read it, but don't take it too much to heart.'

Reading the Afrikaner paper's leader, her mouth went dry and she uttered a cry. She dropped in her chair confused and perplexed. The indignant editor complained that Olive, in writing about Afrikaners had chosen as type, the 'despised white frontiersman' or, as in *The Story of an African Farm,* the Boer woman, Tant'Sannie, the dour, pious, barely literate farmer. Olive began to tremble; astonished and deeply wounded when all she had wanted to achieve with her story was an understanding, a recognition by English speaking South Africans of Dutch valour. In a defiant mood, Olive took a large envelope into which she slipped a copy of her revised companion essay, 'The Wanderings of the Boer' for forwarding to the editor at London's *Fortnightly Review*, the magazine in which her first essay on 'The Boer', was due to appear in full in the July issue.

But the *Ons Land* criticism left her hurt and angry and when Cron came in, she raged against the philistinism of Cape Afrikaners. 'It would be a sad day for art when each character not ideally perfect was regarded as an attack upon the nation whose nationality it shared!' Cron, apparently, didn't know what she was talking about, and she thrust the Dutch paper at him. She felt her face reddening and she began to wheeze.

'Calm down woman, and take a hold,' he said sternly and Olive crumpled. He looked at her piteously. 'Nothing can be so terrible, surely?' His frown faded and was replaced by the milder, kinder face of the man who had nursed her through worse than this. He pulled her towards him and she sank into his chest. She swallowed a rising sob and grumbled,

'Fancy my Home Rule friends crying out that I am false to the cause that by creating the character of Bonaparte Blenkins, I travestied the Irishman!' She blinked up at Cron and saw a spark of connection.

He said, 'They didn't like your essay?'

In a letter of reply to her brother, she conveyed her pain. 'I expected the English papers to attack me and say I was playing into the hand of the Dutchman, but that the Dutch should attack me seems impossible. It's as though you came to a man's help when a big man was trying to get him down, and he planted you a blow between the eyes!'

She stepped out of her study onto the stoep and lit a cigarette. The air was still. She gazed at the the opalescent sky and, in the distance, saw a dust cloud moving towards the Homestead. She held her hand over her eyes to shade them from the shedding light of late afternoon. The mare was trotting at speed and she could see Cron holding onto his hat. He slowed down at the property boundary and turned in. She stubbed out her cigarette and went out to meet him. 'What is it?' she called. Cron swung himself down from the trap.

'Great excitement in the town; they've arrested Gardner Williams for smuggling arms. Coming from America most likely; he's one of theirs, would have his contacts.'

Olive shrieked. 'The De Beers manager?'

'The very one.'

'Well, British justice has a funny way of working, but it does eventually. And didn't we know it, the raid had De Beers name written all over it.' She helped Cron offload a basket of groceries.

'The Company might be looking for a new manager,' he said, emptying his pockets of mail. 'Where's Blessing? I need his help with the vehicle.' He turned to release the mare from her harness and Olive saw her house-boy scurrying from the neighbours' property. He was carrying a pail.

The small house, some one hundred yards distant from the Homestead, had stood weather beaten and unoccupied since Olive and Cron's arrival in Kimberley, but now it had occupants. Returning from the Kowie, Olive had noticed curtains on the windows and a cab parked out front and she had gone over and introduced herself to the new tennants. They were a coloured family. Blessing arrived panting, handed Olive a bucket of lemons and went to help Cron. She peered at the fruit, they were very small but the friendly gesture touched her. She emptied them in with the groceries and wandered over to the house to return the pail. The woman opened the front door; her baby perched on her hip. She apologised to Olive for the size of the lemons, said if they were no good, she was to throw them away. It was the lack of water in the dry, she said. They fell to talking about her husband's work. He was a cab driver. She said it kept him in town every day, sometimes he had to travel far, between Kimberley and smaller hamlets dotted about the

countryside. Olive chucked the smiling baby under its chin and it reached out to her with its fat little hands. 'May I hold him?' She asked. The woman happily obliged and Olive nursed the little boy and kissed him on his tight knot of curls before handing him back to his mother. The woman burst forth unexpectedly,

'I wonder that you kiss the child. Most white people wouldn't touch it because its skin is a little darker than theirs.'

The next day, settling in her study, Olive thought about what her neighbour had said. She had been reminded of the problem for the half-caste in South Africa. On Dutch farms where Olive had worked in her youth, the coloured servants seemed to have a special relationship with their employer, but in the towns, they were not trusted. She had heard it said by her English-speaking countrymen that they preferred the Kaffirs to the Coloureds. Yet they were a significant group of inhabitants in the country, and she resolved to write about them. She would bring some light to their lived experience and challenge the vulgar dictum that because of the circumstances of his birth, the half-caste is morally, if not mentally, defective. She tapped her thumb on her lips. Where to begin? At the beginning of their story, of course. She picked up her pen and wrote at the top of the page: *The Problem of Slavery.* She heard Cron creeping about outside her door. He knew not to interrupt her when the study door was closed, but he had a way of communicating to her his desire to talk. She put down her pen. He had made a pot of coffee; did she want a cup? She took it to her room.

The South African Boer of the Seventeenth Century, she wrote, was a slave owner, no more so than the British who owned Jamaican plantations or the Spaniard in Cuba. *In South Africa, we do not breed slaves. To turn into profitable beasts of burden our little artistic Bushman, or our dancing Hottentots; and our warlike Zulu Bantus would hardly have been more possible than a leash of African lions.* She knew from her reading of history that slaves of the Boer were children kidnapped from beaches on the west and east coasts of Africa and brought to him on English owned ships by English seamen.

Slavery bequeathed to the Boer, and to South Africa mainly through him, its large half-cast population. She rested her pen and reflected again on her neighbour's words, delivered matter-of-factly, without emotion. Was she born of a woman who had learnt as a child that it belonged neither wholly to the black group who ate their food in the kitchen doorway, nor to the white, in the great dining-hall? She picked up her pen, words formultating in her head as she dipped the pen in ink. *Legal slavery in South Africa has*

passed away, but its causes and evils are not to be found in a study of South Africa or America, but among the shadows within our own hearts. Her nib paused, the ink thickening as she thought about those shadows that lurked still in men and women's hearts that force them to turn away from the Coloured. She added a short sentence. *What the Dutchman began, the Englishman finishes.*

Olive and Cron routinely opened the pages of their newspapers to see what the new day's crisis would be. Already, they had learned that Mr Merriman and a handful of other parliamentarians had failed in their bid to have the South African Company Charter revoked, and she saw the Inquiry established in its wake, as a sop to these earnest men.

Today they learned the native tribes in the North were in revolt and, it was reported, Rhodes had left Cape Town to 'rescue' the situation. Cron had bought four different papers from town so that they could try and piece together the half-truths being reported.

'It seems the Matabele are claiming back their territory,' he said. 'With half the Chartered forces banged up in prison, perhaps they see it as an opportune time.' Olive was pouring over another daily spread open in front of her.

'And an opportune time for Rhodes to be away from the Cape Parliament,' she snorted, affecting sympathy. 'Oh, what a pity for Mr Rhodes, that he shan't be able to front the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Raid.'

Since the reluctance of the Cape Colony press to publish Olive and Cron's essay on 'The Political Situation', Cron reasoned they must share their ideas with their countrymen verbally. He would present their paper at the forthcoming meeting of the Cradock Farmers Association, he told Olive. It pleased her much that her husband had developed his own public persona, and seemed fearless in expressing his views before an audience. With sudden guilt, Olive remembered their refusal to entertain Cron's mother and sister at the Homestead in the autumn. At the time, she explained to Cron that she would have to give up all her work, and he said she mustn't. The dear old lady had written a sweet letter in reply, saying she was not at all pained. '

Be sure to visit your mother in Hopetown,' she said. 'It's only a short detour'. Cron seemed gratified at her suggestion, but he hesitated.

'You know it will add on another four days absent,' he said.

Ten glorious days without interruption and without routine, she thought, trying hard to conceal the sense of release this gave her. Her essay on the half-caste needed more work and she wanted to expand it to include a study of all the native races of South Africa—the Bushman, the Khoi and the Bantu. London's *Fortnightly Review* had promised publication.

She shrugged. 'It's important Cron, I don't want to be a wife who jealously keeps her husband to herself.'

In June, Olive learnt that the peaceable Mashona tribe had joined the uprising in Rhodesia. White settlers had been killed and the newspapers turned up the volume of outrage. *White women and children murdered!* Olive saw these reports as a cynical attempt to incite men to wage war on the natives. It was the same methods used to incite men to mass on the Transvaal Border six months earlier. At the time, she had felt disgust at this portrayal in the media of women as helpless beings, believing it played to the baser instincts of men, and was never intended to save women anyway. With a heavy dose of suspicion, she thought the current claims about the perils for white women would be used to execute a war against the natives, and as with the Jameson Raid, it didn't take a polymath to know who would be its beneficiaries.

In short time, she and Cron learnt that quelling the native insurgency was now being called 'a campaign', and more disturbing was to learn that this campaign had received an endorsement from the British Government. Cron had seen large numbers of men and mounts boarding the train at Kimberley *en route* to the railhead at Mafeking.

'They're taking in machine guns. Saw at least four Maxims being loaded,' he told Olive. She was appalled.

'Oh, dear God, what can we do? This is an outrage. The British public need to understand these people, the native tribes of our land. It is only natural that they will fight to reclaim what was theirs. When the English public read my essay, they will see our native peoples as human and not as flies to be squashed.' Feeling helpless and frustrated, Olive wrote scathingly to her socialist friends in the home country: 'I'm glad to hear you are fighting the good fight with the Capitalists; but your fight is all cakes and ale compared to ours out at the Cape. They only try to overwork you but they try to shoot us! You people in England don't know what the heel of a Capitalist is when it gets right flat on the neck of a people. Now they are killing the poor Mashona.'

Some levity to the anxiety that hung over the Homestead in these troubled days arrived in Kimberley in the form of Mr S L Clemens, better known to readers as Mark Twain. Cron brought home the flyer announcing the American novelist's visit. Billed as his 'At Home' speaking tour of South Africa, Clemens was scheduled to present an evening of musings and humour at the Kimberley town hall on the last day of June. Olive thought this wonderful news and declared that they must go to hear him.

'You might want to read this, before you make that decision,' he said, raising his eyebrows and handing her a 'special feature' article he had lifted from the library copy of the *Johannesburg Times.* It was a journalist's interview with the famous man who had arrived in Durban. She took the paper from Cron and her eyes raced through the script.

She read aloud, *Mr Stead says that Cecil Rhodes and Olive Schreiner are far and away the two greatest figures in South Africa. What is your opinion of the latter, Mr Clemens?*

'It's nice of Stead to say that about me, but I don't like being paired with Rhodes.' As she read Mr Clemens' response to the question, she felt her face redden and she daren't look at Cron. Bravely, she parodied the American's answer.

"Plenty good enough for a girl of her age!" She humphed. 'What does that tell the reader? One gathers *An African Farm* is the only work of mine Mr Clemens has ever read. Perhaps he should try reading some of my South African essays, it might give him a better insight to the country he has chosen to visit.' She took a deep breath and looked sheepishly at Cron. 'I still want to go to hear him speak.'

The auditorium was packed to the gills, thick with body odour and the din of excited chatter. This high brow event seemed to have brightened the dull and routine lives of Kimberley's culture-starved citizens. Olive had spruced herself up for the occasion, imagining that Mark Twain might call on her to take a bow. She hoped he would not ask her to speak for she had nothing to say. As they pushed along to the front, where seats had been reserved for them, she thought the audience a raffish looking lot, and she couldn't help compare them unfavourably with the patrons of a Richter concert in Paris, or a play in London's West End. She recognised some carriage folk sitting in the audience, the doctors and their wives, the hotel manager and his wife, and Cron stopped to shake hands with the president of the Kimberley Literary Society. Olive greeted the librarian sitting in the row behind, as they took their seats.

The man who all had come to see entered the stage to a rousing applause, his mass of thick white hair and bushy eyebrows standing on end as though he had just received an electric shock, Olive thought. The evening's entertainment began with Mr Clemens heaping lavish praise on South African hospitality. He continued with a polished performance interspersing stories from the Americas and elsewhere with light-hearted humour and witticisms, drawing much laughter and applause for his conversational style.

Olive admired his verbal skills, his ability to string words and thoughts and sentences together, rather like an essayist, she thought, who worked his tongue rather than his pen. She had sat tense for most of the evening, wondering what he was going to say about South African political matters, but he avoided all mention of the raid on Johannesburg, even though he had lately come from that city. She was disappointed but understood his apparent sensitivity around the swathe of divided public opinion in the country. When Clemens reached the end of his 'At Home' performance, neither had he mentioned her name. She thought it possible he hadn't been made aware of her presence in the hall or was it that, in catching her eye as he meandered back and forth across the stage delivering his meditations, he was in his own way, acknowledging her.

In July, the Cape Parliamentary Inquiry into the Jameson Raid reported. It found wrong-doing, but not from any 'sordid motives' on Mr Rhodes part but, '…on the evidence before them, it was not consistent with his duty as Prime Minister of the Colony.' Olive's brother moved a motion in the House that the findings be accepted. A Bondsman seconded. Olive could only feel sadness for her brother, as she read his accompanying speech, reprinted in full in the *Cape Times.* "What the man did, however wrong-headed, was for the best of intentions", Will had said. It seemed her brother's regard for Rhodes had remained solid despite her attempts to make him see otherwise. Cron tried to lighten her burden.

'You see the world whole. Will sees it steadily,' he said. She gave him a reluctant smile. One day, she thought, the blinkers will fall from my brother's eyes.

Within days, Olive received a reply from Seymour Fort to her request that he be her 'ears and eyes' to goings on in the North. 'The papers don't tell it straight,' she had written. Seymour Fort told her about a young man who served in Captain Spreckley's unit, was returned to Bulawayo and in a bad way. The soldier was threatening to write to the papers and expose matters, atrocities he had witnessed, but Seymour Fort had counselled against this action, believing it would be futile and would serve only to bring

opprobrium on himself. She wondered if the man was a friend of Seymour Fort's. She showed Cron his letter. Cron let out a low whistle.

'We need to get that young man down here,' she said.

'There's a postal run between Mafeking and Bulawayo, fellow by the name of Wilson, I believe,' said Cron.

'If we could get Mr Wilson to bring him back, he could board the train from Mafeking to Kimberley.'

'I'll make enquiries tomorrow. Do we have the name of Seymour Fort's friend?'

'He doesn't say, but he will act as a go-between. We should wire him early.'

Olive could not sit still. Her anxieties seemed to be in every direction, the rift in her family, the fighting in the North, the ruptures in the Cape Parliament, and the most dreadful foreboding that she felt in regard to Rhodes. She had felt the same foreboding last November, before the Raid.

A letter arrived at the Homestead from Mr. Merriman addressed to Mrs Schreiner. Theirs had become a regular communication built on mutual respect for each other's political acumen, as well as a shared curiosity, she discovered, in matters scientific. This prompted a vigorous exchange of ideas, centred on Olive's essays on South Africa and its peoples. She considered the politician an intelligent reader and had sent him her most recent articles on *The Problem of Slavery* and on *The Wanderings of the Boer*. In relation to the first, Merriman had expressed the view that the Bushman—the San people—the oldest and to most people's way of thinking, the most primitive tribe, would eventually die out in South Africa.

In the spirit of advancing knowledge, Olive always responded to questions put with lengthy exposition and counterpoint. In this instance, she was brief: 'I don't know why the Bushman must die: they have kept alive a variety of the original wild cattle of Europe in Northumberland since the thirteenth century!' On her Boer essays, Merriman wanted to know why Olive had paid so little attention to the Boer woman. She felt the jibe of his remark and could only respond honestly. 'Yes, you are quite right. I have not dealt adequately with the Boer Woman, but my next article is called 'The Boer Woman', and is entirely devoted to her.' This essay, she thought, would meld nicely with her still to be written scientific book on the subject of the sexes; fresh ideas of which had come to her while out driving on the veld with Cron.

They had passed a large wagon with a team of ten donkeys, lead by a small hottentot boy. The wagon was laden with wood and dried cakes of manure for the

Kimberley market next morning. On the voorkist (front box) sat a heavy Boer woman who wore a black dress without regard to fashion, and a large cotton kapje (sun bonnet). In her hand she held a wagon whip made from bamboo. She scowled at them as they passed '*Verdomde Engelse vrou*, do you think I care for your ridicule?' With her whip she gave a resounding clap in the air over the backs of her donkeys. Olive found out later that the woman had nine children and was the wife of an invalid man too feeble to work. She was a 'bywoner', a poor farmer living on the land of a richer farmer. Olive would have liked to share with the woman her great admiration for her labour and her courage. The encounter prompted her to think about the Woman Question, recently transmuted into the modern Women's Movement. This, she believed, was a movement of a vast unemployed—not factory girls—but the parasitic wives or daughters of wealthy men. The bywoner woman may be laughed at by women in fancy hats attending market day but she was, Olive saw, the *real* leader of the new woman the world over.

She finished her letter to Merriman with an invitation. 'When my essay on the Boer Woman is written, I shall be exceedingly interested to find out what you think. Incidentally, it also deals with the Woman Question.'

She could not seal her pedagogic epistle to the politician without sharing with him that which had consumed her waking hours since the defeat of his motion in the Parliament, against the Chartered Company. 'I am continually haunted by the dread that Rhodes and his backers in high circles at home will yet plunge South Africa in war. To you who are more behind the scenes it may seem ridiculous. It seems to me his last card. If he fails in that he is done for.'

CHAPTER TWENTY

August 1896

She stood on the platform and waited for the shunting and bursts of steam to subside. The carriage doors opened and passengers peeled out. They were young men mostly, and to her eyes, one man looked much the same as another; all sturdy fellows dressed in bush clothes and boots and all of them wearing felt hats. She surmised that if the man she was here to meet had ridden with the Chartered Company forces, he might be wearing a more distinctive dress, something like a uniform. Her man was the last to emerge. Though he wore no uniform, she knew it was he because he was making his way towards her. The slight, tense body was boyish, frailer than those who had bounded down the platform passing her without so much as a glance. Olive's expectations were uncertain; 'he is in a bad way', Seymour Fort had warned.

'Miss Schreiner?'

'Peter?'

'It is me.'

Olive held out her hand and she saw him hesitate.

'I'm very glad you've come,' she said. We've booked you a room at the Victoria Hotel, but perhaps you have other plans?' Peter shrugged. She pointed to a scuffed bag left lying in its isolation near the luggage van. 'Is that yours?' He nodded and reached for it. 'Would you like a porter?' She watched him bend to lift his duffel onto his shoulder. She observed his sloping forehead and hard-set jaw over which the soft white hairs of early manhood were scattered. He said no, he didn't need a porter. Olive said, 'It's only a short walk. Have you been to Kimberley before?'

'Passed through going north,' he said. They exited the station and followed along the dusty street, Olive pointing out buildings of interest and the various trading houses. Peter nodded but spoke only once, to ask where could he post a letter to his mother, and she said the postal service was located in Morley's trading house.

At the cross street, they stood waiting for the traffic to pass. A black woman approached them, she was begging, she carried a baby on her back. To Olive's surprise, Peter jerked away raising his hand to his face as if shielding his eyes from her gaze. Olive

thought his behaviour odd, she gave the woman a coin and she wandered away from them. Entering the hotel, Olive lead her guest to the reception desk. 'This is Peter Smith, he is checking in on my account,' she said. Her guest was given a room key and said he would carry his bag, he needed no assistance. Olive noticed his pale shifting eyes nervously scanning the lobby. She invited him to rest. 'I have some work to do in the library. I'll meet you here in an hour if you like.' His eyes seemed to roll in his head, unfocused, unable to meet hers. He spoke softly,

'Thankyou.'

When Olive returned to the Victoria, she had to wait another hour before Peter emerged and then only after she had sent somebody up to his door. He apologised, said he had fallen asleep. 'Did you dream?' she asked. He muttered,

'A nightmare, not a dream, can't sleep without them.'

'I'm sorry, Peter, dreams can be so real and nightmares quite terrifying.'

'I try not to sleep; they haunt me so,' he said.

'Would you like to eat?'

'Can we go somewhere quiet? I don't like crowds.'

The soft clack of the clock on the wall above the front desk showed five minutes to eleven. They would have an hour to talk before the dinner crowd arrived at the hotel dining room. They could sit in the far corner, she said.

Olive ordered an omelette and Peter said, yes, he would have an omelette, too. He whispered something to the waiter and was brought a glass of brandy. He slurped a mouthful. 'I'm not alone, you understand?' he said pointing to the brandy. 'It's the only friend we have up there.' Olive waved her hand in front of her face.

'How is Seymour Fort? He and I were good friends when he lived in Cape Town, but I haven't seen him since, though we do correspond.'

'Mr Fort is a friend of mine, too. He took me to the Bulawayo Club,' said Peter. When their food arrived, he held up his empty glass to the waiter, and Olive ordered a pot of tea. Disturbed by the young man's consumption of alcohol, she cut to the chase.

'Seymour Fort tells me you went with Captain Spreckley.' She saw Peter's thin lips quiver and he bristled.

'I was enlisted, by the Company…it's what troopers do.' Olive wanted to ask, *what did you do?* but she could feel the tension in Peter and thought he would most likely bolt if she pushed. She changed the subject.

'Tell me about yourself. Does your mother live in England?'

‘She lives in the village where I grew up. You won’t have heard of it. Gillingham, it’s in Dorset.’

‘No, I haven’t. And your father, what does he do?’

He paused. ‘I don’t have a father. He passed away when I was an infant.

‘I know that feeling, Peter. I lost my father when I was young.’

He said, ‘It’s why I came out to Africa, to make money to support my mother. She didn’t want me to go mind, but the poor woman’s knuckles are rubbed raw from the washer tub, and she isn’t getting any younger.’ He quietened, and reached for his fork.

Olive said, ‘Mothers are precious people. Do you miss her?’ Peter swallowed before answering.

‘She brought me up, worked hard to send me to school.’ His miserable eyes fixed on Olive, accusing, almost hostile. ‘She’s a good English woman.’ He reached for his brandy and Olive poured her tea. She offered him tea, but he shook his head. Softening, he said, ‘My mother had a teapot with ducks on it. Very pretty it was, but me, I never drunk the stuff.’

‘What did you drink at home?’ she asked.

‘Drank in the ale house with the lads, after dark when the farm work was done.’ She was glad Peter found these memories calming.

‘What did they grow on the farm?’

‘Some sheep, corn mostly. Ever seen a reaping machine at work?’ he asked her. ‘Cuts heads off corn clean, no heavy labour involved, just need a horse to pull it.’ Then Peter’s face buckled. ‘Should never have come out here, found no gold on the Rand; the big miners had it all staked out by the time I got there.’ In spite of his agitation, he was back where she wanted to be.

‘Why did you go to Bulawayo?’

‘For land. They told us in Johannesburg that land in Rhodesia was there for the asking.’

‘And that’s when you met Seymour Fort?’

‘Good fellow, Fort, said he would like to give it me, but it had to be earned. There was a war going on and if I enlisted as a trooper, then Mr Rhodes would parcel out the land won to us. I’d never fired a gun before, but handling those maxims was easy.’ He fell silent. Then his head jerked up and his eyes flared red. ‘We mowed down those niggers as though they was heads of corn.’ His chilling laugh made Olive’s flesh creep and she stared at him. Suddenly Peter started, a party had entered the dining room. In haste, he

bumped the table and Olive's tea swished in its cup. 'Sorry, sorry, Miss Schreiner. I have to go now. Will you come for me tomorrow? I have to go now.' Olive's answer, muted by the rise and fall of animated voices from indifferent Kimberley folk, floated after Peter as he fled out a side door. She stayed seated, feeling numbed by what she had heard and seen. Peter was a man in distress, she thought, a victim of the horrors he had witnessed no less than the men he had killed. She wondered how he would be at their next meeting. By tomorrow, if she were lucky, he might have settled a little, be more trusting and perhaps willing to speak more freely. They hadn't arranged a time. She would leave a note for him at the hotel reception.

Olive's neighbour drove her home in his cab. Mattius' good-humoured banter did little to lighten her mood or her heavy chest. She wheezed at Cron who was sitting in his study reading. 'You left me!' He swung around.

'I asked Mattius to wait for you at the hotel. Wasn't he there?'

'Yes, but I needed you.' She turned sharply and walked away. Cron came after her.

'Olive, listen. You told me you had to talk to that man alone.' She was at the back door whistling to Mill. She knew Cron didn't welcome dogs inside the house and was determined to allow Mill in. She flopped in a chair and encouraged the dog onto her lap, but Mill was soon down on the floor, and under her seat hiding and whimpering. 'Mill! Get out from there.' Cron was at the back door holding it open and the dog slunk past him. Olive glared.

'Why did you do that? I need someone to love me right now.' Her voice quivered and Cron said, 'I'll make you some tea and we can talk.'

Next day, Cron drove Olive into Kimberley. The grounds man at the Victoria helped her down from the trap and Cron gave him a coin. He turned to Olive. 'I'll go to Morley's and meet you here in an hour.' He gripped her arm. 'Take it slowly; you may need longer. I'll be waiting in the hotel lobby.'

It was where she found Peter when she entered, relief etched on his face at seeing her. He allowed himself a half smile. She greeted him and avoided asking how his night had been. She suggested they go elsewhere, said she knew a place where they would not be disturbed. There was an ante-room at the town hall, she would ask the concierge if they

could occupy it for an hour. Exiting the hotel, Peter said he needed tobacco and Olive said she had cigarettes. They could enjoy a smoke together. He looked surprised. 'I've not seen a lady smoke before,' he said.

'Doctor's orders.' From the corner of her eye she glanced him grinning.

They sat at a large table, the door closed behind them. The concierge had hung a 'do not disturb' sign on the outside. Olive offered Peter a cigarette and matches then she lit her own. He drew down hard, and blew smoke rings into the musty air. 'Why did you want to expose these matters?' she asked him.

'It's wrong, what is happening up there. I've worked on farms all me life,' he said. 'Spreckley said we was to slash and burn. Whole crops of mealie we set on fire, the nigger kraals burnt to the ground.' Olive struggled to repress a desire to commiserate with words, but this was Peter's time, she must stay quiet and listen. For forty minutes Peter talked, recalling scenes he had witnessed of floggings and lynching of natives suspected of spying. His revelations were harrowing and made her feel like vomiting and she reached for her cigarettes. As she prepared a light she saw her hands were shaking. Peter hadn't noticed, he had spun into a different world, reliving the nightmare of war, his nightmare. When she asked him about the native women, his bloodshot eyes watered up and his face twisted and he wept, turning away from her. She lit him a cigarette. He calmed himself, wiped his face on his sleeve. His voice faulted as he spoke. 'They're fair game for the men…when they've had their fun, they laugh and tell them to skittle…if they don't move…' She saw his strong jaw buckle and he turned his head away, sucking back grief. She shuddered. Peter's reaction to the black woman who approached them yesterday made sense to her now. She knew that the native women almost always had children or babies with them, but she daren't ask Peter about the children.

Olive returned to the hotel alone. Cron was waiting for her. On the ride home, she didn't speak. She felt as cold as stone. Blessing and Mill came out to meet them, the dog's tail wagging with ecstasy, and her heart thawed a little. They went into the kitchen. The kettle on the hob was shooting steam. Cron made coffee. Placing a cup in front of her, he said. 'Do you want to tell me about it?' She looked heavenward.

'It was enough to make God cry.'

That night, the weather turned bitter, and Olive listened to the wind whistling under cracks in doors and through windows. The gardening implements kept on the stoep, rattled and crashed, and Mill set up a howl. She shivered, pulling her shawl about her. Cron lit a fire

in the stove that stood in a corner of the room. She watched, mesmerized by the crackling flames, lost in her thoughts. He said, 'What is Peter going to do now?'

'He's going home.' She sat quietly, her mind tracing over her encounter with Peter Smith. Then she said, 'It doesn't help me at all to think that in fifty years time, all this injustice will be terribly paid for in white man's blood.' Olive's hatred of Chartered Company rule in the north was intense; its troop leaders reckless mercenaries, and yet their campaign was said to be against rebels, murderers and savages. Now, she asked herself, who are the savages?

'And what are you going to do?' said Cron. She thought about it.

'No use going to the papers; they don't want to know. One or two English papers might, the *Manchester Guardian*, but Peter would have to be prepared to talk, and frankly, I think he just wants to forget.'

Turning in, Cron fell to sleep quickly. She listened to the cadence of his breathing. She thought about Peter. Her mind ticked over. Where was God in Matabele and Mashonaland? What of Peter's dreams, his nightmares? She thought of his mother, a good woman who had tried to raise a good son. Was this why Peter had cracked? Peter was disillusioned. He had expected to find easy money in South Africa, like so many who came. He had volunteered his services to the Chartered Company on the promise of land, thought it might be fun to take pot shots at blacks. Instead, he had found brutality on a scale unimagined. She moaned, recalling his testimony. These atrocities, she thought, must be called out, documented. But what of Peter, the man who had witnessed and perpetrated these same atrocities? If she were to write about these matters, it would have to be his story. She thought about her writing, her fictional narratives, their biblical style, her use of dream as a form of expression for vision and thought. She became aware that the wind had dropped and Mill had stopped growling. Her eyes flicked to the window, outside was black, the stars and the moon blanketed by cloud. She rolled over and murmured, 'If Christ came to South Africa.'

When Olive woke, she sat bolt upright alert to something big. She blinked in sunlight and in that split second from semi to full consciousness it came to her, Trooper Peter's story complete. Cron was not beside her. She glanced at the marble clock on the dresser. She had slept late. She leapt from her bed and wrapping her gown around her, went directly to her study. She knew exactly how her story would begin. She took an unused exercise book and dipping her pen she sat a moment formulating the opening sentence, and then she wrote it down:

It was a dark night; a chill breath was coming from the east; not enough to disturb the blaze of Trooper Peter's fire, yet enough to make it quiver. He sat alone beside it on the top of a kopje. All about was an impenetrable darkness; not a star was visible in the black curve over his head. She paused; then she crossed out *Peter's* and inserted *Peter Halket's*. She leant back on her chair then she bent forward and wrote at the top of the page: *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*.

Olive knew where her creative strengths lay—in the universal language of archetypal images offered by allegory and dream, and she knew, too, that in Peter Smith she had all the makings of a good story, a poor young Englishman of the lower classes who dreams of wealth and prestige, expressing his sexual energy in risk taking and adventure, a missing father, a moral upbringing by his mother, and thus a conflicted conscience when faced with the brutal reality of Chartered Company rule. From disciplined habit, Olive did not share with anyone her work until it was written out, but waking to Peter's story fully fledged on her mind, brought a joy she hadn't experienced for years. She returned to her bedroom, changed out of her nightclothes and went in search of Cron. She found him in the yard at the back of the house. He was unrolling wire for the chicken coup. 'I've got it!' she shouted. Cron was bent double holding down one end of the wire while Blessing, stepping backwards, was unrolling the coil. Cron looked over his shoulder. She said, 'It came to me, as soon as I woke, an allegory story about Matabeleland.' She spun on her heel and retraced her steps, stopping at the kitchen to pour coffee and pick at the remains of last night's dinner, the story in her mind gathering pace as she ate and drank.

She wondered about her morality in using this man's tragedy for her own purposes. But her character was Trooper Peter Halket and not the troubled man with whom she had spent the past days. Her Peter would not confess to wrong doings, but would rationalize them. He would not crumple, but would be healed by a moral conversion during his long lonely night on the kopje after becoming separated from his company. Through the medium of dream, she would have Peter visited by a Christ-like stranger who would talk to him and question him and make a plea for justice towards his Native brother. Returned to her desk, a line came into her head and she wrote it down.

You are twin branches of one tree; you are the sons of one mother. Is this goodly land not wide enough for you, that you should rend each other's flesh at the bidding of those who will wet their beaks in both your vitals?

As Olive imagined the story unfolding in dialogue between her characters, she felt a power and a duty in what she was about to create, but she also felt fear. She set to work.

A peace settled on the Homestead in the month of September while Olive worked. Cron, too, had taken to writing again, this most recent effort an article on the ostrich which he hoped to have published in the *Zoologist.* This pleased Olive that he should be so engaged, especially that he was writing about farm husbandry. 'You've so much knowledge up here, man!' she said, knocking her head with her fist, '…you must share it.' Cron went most days into Kimberley, to research in the library for both his projects—the Angora goat book still not completed—leaving the Homestead in the morning and returning after eating his dinner at the Victoria. They had agreed that he should take his meals outside to leave Olive space to concentrate on her writing. In the evenings, they sat together, no longer huddled around the fire, the encroaching spring bringing with it a mild night air. She told him about progress with her allegory, and he told her about discoveries he had made with his reading.

'Did you know that the male ostrich watches over the eggs and the young with as much tender solicitude as the female?' he said.

'Did you read that?

'All farmers have observed the behaviour so it's not new knowledge but yes, I did read about it today in a bird book.'

She asked him other questions about the habits of the ostrich, and became conscious that she was more talkative on this night. She had progressed so well with her story, she had allowed herself to think about life outside of her book. She believed her new work, her 'little' book she called it (for she had no intention of writing a novel length work), would sell well in England and America. 'I'm going to write to T Fisher Unwin, he is the most likely to publish it,' she said. Mill let out a contented growl while she warmed her feet on his upturned belly. Like the dog, Cron, too, had rolled over in his opposition to the animal's presence in the house, but he insisted that Mill be put outside at night. Olive accepted this as a necessary affirmation of her husband's self-respect, and had made up a bed of old clothes on the stoep for Mill.

As work on her novella had progressed, so did a strengthening sense of her own worth. She now felt that the long-anticipated journey abroad was within reach.

'If Fisher accepts it for publication, we can afford to take our holiday in Europe,' she said brightly.

'I have my own money, Olive,' he reminded her. 'Not much of my capital is left I grant you, but I have enough for travel.'

She sensed a bristling pride and said mischievously, 'Then be a dear and bankroll me until the royalties start flowing.' It had always been a matter of faith rather than principle that Olive had eschewed financial support from her husband—monetary independence, she believed, was the bedrock of a truly shared sympathy and affection in marriage. He asked flatly,

'If they accept your book, they will give you an advance, won't they?'

'I hope. It's not nice to be stony broke.' Their conversation had taken a turn in a direction she had not intended. Light hearted banter that in the space of half a minute had become snarled. Cron was up and moving about the house, picking up and putting away books and newspapers. Mill watched and waited and when Cron began moving towards the back door, the dog sprang onto its paws, Olive bending to pass a consoling hand along its back as it scuttled out.

As was her forte, Olive had drawn on a mix of literary techniques in writing out her story of *Trooper Peter.* She had blended narrative plot with symbolism and interpolations, but these were surpassed, in her mind, by the medium she had employed to externalize Peter's inner conflict. It was the stranger from Palestine who, sitting around the lonely fire, had subjected Peter to critical questioning. She believed this was her real strength, the dream dialogue, and she felt as she read over what she had written, it was her best yet. She knew the ending—her narrative plot—before she had started. Now, she had to write it out but she could not suppress the exhilaration she felt at having achieved so much and seeing the end in sight. With a sense of weightless euphoria, she began writing letters. She wrote first to WT Stead.

'It's a sad world out here, my friend. I wish you with your sympathetic soul and a clear eye for truth when once you see it, could come out here. I will risk a prophecy—in four years time you will feel just as I do about South African affairs.' Olive underlined the five words following 'truth'. She was disappointed in Stead's continuing failure to accept her word about the irreparable damage men like Rhodes and his Chartered Company were doing to her country. Olive's mind drifted to her essay on 'The Englishman' that had remained in draft, sitting on her study bookshelf gathering dust. Events had overtaken her so quickly. She thought of the publisher, T Fisher Unwin, from whom she had recently received news of his new American monthly, *Cosmopolis.* She could offer him both her

novella and her essay, as a package. She would, however, be firm in her terms to any agreement. She was no longer the wide-eyed ingénue who had been deceived by her first publisher, who sold *African Farm* to the Americans without so much as a penny returned to her. She would insist on retaining the copyright to *Trooper Peter* for that market.

Olive knew that Bulawayo—the self-proclaimed capital of the self-proclaimed territory of Rhodesia—had its share of native women concubines and prostitutes, the inevitable and tragic repercussion of war. She also knew, as did the game hunter, Mr Selous, that it was *not* the root cause of the uprising. It was with a sense of outrage, then, that she read in *The Diamond Fields Advertiser* an editorial, quoting Mr Selous, that Olive Schreiner believed the war in the North was caused by black men's grievances at the way their women were treated by white men. At the best of times, she resented these intrusions into her private space; the misunderstandings and worse, misrepresentations of what she had said, and even what she thought. She wrote an angry letter to *The Advertiser* in response. In a follow up letter to the editor, Mr Selous apologized for misquoting her. He had, he said, confused her comments with those made by WT Stead. Cron listened as she read aloud, the letter of apology.

'You don't suppose Rhodes has squared with Stead, do you? We know Rhodes purchases journalists, and newspapers. It's a wonder to me he hasn't bought *The Advertiser.*' She stared at him coldly. It was almost too much to bear, the suggestion that her journalist friend would allow himself to be so compromised.

'You don't know Stead. He's an ethical man. When we go to London, I'll introduce you and you will see the man I see.'

Olive valued deeply her regular correspondence with the journalist, as she did with other friends of strong inquiring mind and in whom she had an implicit trust. Her school-teacher friend in Port Elizabeth, Miss Molteno, was another. She had lately received from Betty Molteno a letter that perplexed and troubled her. Betty had raised questions. Did Olive think a married woman's life more noble or broader than a single woman's? Had Betty misunderstood her comment about having children, she wondered. Olive had expressed the view that any woman who had a child should feel she is receiving a great reward, and a woman who doesn't feel so should never have children at all. She responded on the instant, reassuring her friend that no, she did not think that. On the contrary, it was married women, modern, wealthy and middle class who complained about the burden of having children that she most detested, especially as they had little to do in

raising the child, employing servants and governesses and all sorts of single women to do her work. 'I might almost say most, of the noblest and best specimens of womanhood do remain unmarried or marry very late and so leave no offspring, while the worst breed.'

Since their visit to Charles Webber's farm, Olive suffered a second miscarriage, one she hardly felt physically, yet emotionally, it disturbed her more than her previous loss. To Cron, she bemoaned the fact that she had now reached the age of forty. 'I would have had a child when I was young if social mores had allowed for single women to have them. I had money enough from the sales of *African Farm* to support a child for twenty years!' He stroked her arm.

'You give birth to books. That is a special gift few women have.' She gave a rueful smile and said no more. Olive had never quite got used to the way her husband seemed able to rise to the occasion, to soften the blows. She realized she had to content herself with the fact that she may never have a child but silently she resolved to consult a Harley Street gynecologist in London.

The good news carried in Miss Molteno's letter was that she and Miss Greene planned to travel to England in December. Before sealing her letter in reply, she wrote a postscript: 'Cron and I are going to England soon, to deliver my manuscript of *Peter Halket* to the publisher. We may not be ready to go before Christmas. Do you think you could postpone a little so that we four might travel together?'

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

October 1896

The unseasonably warm night air took Olive and Cron outside of the house to sit on chairs on the stoep and gaze at the indigo sky. A scatter of cloud had blotted out the stars. Mill flopped his head on his paws at Olive's feet.

'I was taken aback, I have to admit,' said Cron who had just returned from a trip to Cradock where he attended the local Farmers meeting. 'He wasn't ashamed of his views, spoke them openly.'

'What did the man say, exactly?'she asked.

"If Rhodes can only bring on a war, we'll forgive him everything!" He wasn't a local man, came up from Port Elizabeth apparently.'

The Jameson Raid, far from uniting Dutch and English in outrage, had hardened racial divisions, the Dutch gathering mostly united in one kraal while the English-speaking South Africans splintered into two—patriots loyal to British imperialism, and those who yearned for an independent South Africa. Cron, Olive and their liberal politician friends, Merriman and Sauer, were firmly in the latter kraal, as were many of Cron's farmer associates.

She said, 'Well, we know what they're like. Remember the man at the Kowie?'

'Mm…would like to holiday there again, preferably without the excitement of our last visit.' He paused in thought before continuing. 'This man seemed to be pleading the case that the Natives would fair better under English rule, as if that were justification enough for Britain to make war on the Republic.' She gave a high laugh.

'Oh yes, the English colonists of Tasmania showed the Aborigines how humane they are! And anyway, how can making war on one race to save another ever be just?' she demanded. Cron had no answer and changed the subject.

'How's your writing going?'

'Finished the little book. I'm copying it out now. Miss Molteno wants to read it. She'll think it a Christian story.' Olive chuckled. 'You know how Catholics are, can't distinguish between story and symbolism.'

Cron leant forward resting a hand on her knee. 'That's excellent news. Are you pleased with it?'

'Very. I cried when I wrote the last chapter.' Feeling an immense satisfaction, she reflected on the plot and its resolution. She said, 'Peter releases a black prisoner; and you

can wait until you have the whole to know what happens next.' Cron raised his eyebrows and rested back in his chair. He looked ahead at the thorn tree with its branches ghost white against the blackness of the night.

He said, 'You know, that's the first story you've written since we were married.' Olive blanched.

'I've written a lot of stories, Cron, but they're not fiction, if that is what you call a story.'

'You know what I mean.'

'No, I don't,' she said irritably. '*From Man to Man* is written, the real work done, it needs only patient revising.' She paused and drew breath. 'Life has been turned upside down rather since we were married, what with the baby and my health … and the political situation.' Feeling abandoned, she fell silent. She doubted whether her hard work over these past weeks in crafting the little book had been at all appreciated. Cron shifted in his chair.

'May I read it? I would like to,' he said contritely. She softened.

'My big novel is important to me, Cron, yet I dare not touch it at a lower mood than the mood I wrote it in, or I shall spoil it.' He bent forward, resting his elbows on his knees and lifted his face to her.

'I do try to understand your artistic nature. You know I have always been willing to give you whatever it takes.' He straightened and thumped his knees. 'You'll feel in better mood I'll wager, once you've had a proper holiday.' With a start, he looked skyward. 'What's that noise on the roof?' Mill started barking and Olive tried to quieten him.

'I expect it's Socrates, my pet monkey,' she said. Cron leapt to his feet, peering out and up from the overhang.

'Oh, that's nice. How are we supposed to sleep with him crashing about up there?' Olive stepped off the stoep and raising her eyes upward began clicking her tongue against the roof of her mouth.

'He's only there because we're out here. He wants company.'

They went to the kitchen, Cron to make them cocoa and Olive to put food out, in separate bowls, for the dog and the monkey. To stop the squawking and the growling she placed the bowls a clear distance apart. Cron learnt that Mill had been sleeping indoors during his absence. 'If we put him out Socrates will go on the roof,' she said, appealing to her husband's common sense.

‘I give up. Better to have a dog than a monkey inside,’ he grumbled.

In bed, Cron brushed her lips goodnight and rolled onto his side away from her. She snuggled in, putting her arm around his middle and he patted her hand. She said, ‘Betty and Miss Greene want to travel with us on the ship. Did I tell you?’

‘That’ll be jolly,’ he said wearily. Soon Cron was making sleep noises and Olive’s thoughts turned to their forthcoming visit to the home country. She imagined the scene; proudly introducing her husband to her English friends. She thought about packing and retrieving their warm clothes from storage. It was winter in England. She went over the items in her mind. That night, Olive dreamt. She was in a room full of people; they were literary men, intelligent and curious. They were dressed in tweeds and scarves and boots. Cron was there somewhere, but he kept disappearing and she was anxious for him. There were women in the room that she did not know, and sometimes they disappeared too, but she had the attention of other men who gathered around her, and her anxiety dissipated. She was wearing her summer dress and sandals and she felt strong and sensual, uplifted by her magnetic power.

Next morning, before the heat haze had begun to gather, Cron left for Kimberley. He was going to the barber, he said.

‘Be a dear and pick up some food from Morley’s. I’ve been scavenging for the last week here by myself,’ said Olive, handing him a shopping list.

He returned some two hours later to find her in her study, her door open and sheets of written paper piling on her desk. He brought her coffee and she put down her pen. ‘I’ll take it with you in the lounge,’ she said. They sat together on the sofa. Twisting her body around to look closely at him, she said, ‘A new man. I like it.’ Cron ran his fingers across a head of hair very much shorter than when he had left.

‘Good for the summer,’ he said. They drank their coffee in silence and Olive went to the study and brought out a clump of numbered pages.

‘I’m going to dedicate my little book to Sir George Grey. Now there was an Englishman worthy of his title. True and straight with a common humanity.’ The Lieutenant had come to the Cape Colony as its first Governor when self-government was declared; his reputation as peace-maker in New Zealand and the Australian colonies preceding him. ‘Sir George came to the mission station when I was a baby. My mother said he held me in his arms.’ Cron lifted the first page and read her dedication.

‘And the quote at the bottom’ he asked.

‘Robert Browning, *The Grammarian’s Funeral’*.

‘Mm. You’re fond of Browning, aren’t you?’ It was a rhetorical question.

She said, ‘My biggest regret of my early days in London that I didn’t attend a dinner party in his honour and to which I had been invited. I was afraid, his poetry meant so much, I couldn’t risk being disillusioned at meeting him in the flesh.’ Cron grinned and she wondered if he saw through the disguise to the real reason why she had not attended. She was excruciatingly shy in those days, she had told him. She drank the last mouthful of coffee and returned to her copying out.

She remained troubled by the passages of realist writing in *Peter Halket,* that put the Chartered company in its frame, and her less than oblique condemnation of Rhodes. She feared once her little book was published the backlash would be huge, against her and her husband. To unburden herself of these fears and to warn, she wrote a letter to WT Stead. Like all Olive’s letters to the journalist, it was written no less self-consciously, manipulating her words. ‘My dear friend,’ she began. ‘It’s not Rhodes I object to, it’s his money, which damns him himself and causes him to damn others. I am quite sure if you saw the moral and social devastation Rhodes has worked in this country with his money you would feel as I do’. She finished with her news. ‘We shall be in England by end January latest. And finally, ‘…don’t doubt my deep friendship for you, however much I differ from you in politics.’

For the rest of the day Cron read Olive’s manuscript, only breaking for a late lunch that he prepared. He made them sandwiches of cold chicken. Olive massaged her wrist. Cron ate quietly, she thought him introspective. She poured the tea. Her skin began to itch. ‘What do you think of my story?’

‘It goes without saying, you are a master of the language, but I’d rather not comment until I have read the whole.’

‘You shall have it very soon, but do I go too strong?’

‘You mean on the Chartered Company? No. You’re writing a story about a young trooper’s moral conversion, of course you must explain to the reader the context, what brought Peter to that point.’

‘If I publish, they will proceed against me. I tell you, Cron, I would give hundreds of pounds if the story had never come to me, but it did and I feel I must publish it.’ Cron looked pensive.

‘They wouldn’t proceed against you if you had evidence.’ She cocked her head at him. ‘I’ve found something that might be of use,’ he said.

‘Don’t hold me in suspense, man. What have you found?’ He went to the sideboard where he had earlier placed a rolled print.

‘I saw this in the barber shop window.’ He untied the binding and handed it to her. ‘Asked the barber, may I have it and he sold it to me for three shillings.’ Pushing their plates aside, Olive spread it open on the table, her eyes widened. It was an enlarged photographic copy of three near naked black bodies hanging limp from the boughs of a tree. Ropes were tied around their necks. Ten white men in civilian attire, one in a trooper’s uniform stood in a circle around the tree. One man rested his boot on a tree stump as he looked on with something akin to amusement at the spectacle of these real-time lynchings. Her hand went to her throat. She read the caption. *Hanging spies in the main street of Bulawayo during the Matabele Rebellion, 1896.*

‘It’s what the trooper told me, but in the main street of the town? Their wives and children told to stay indoors, I suppose!’ She pushed back her chair and stood. Spinning angrily on her heel, she said, ‘I have to work this in, Cron. Copying out is going to take a little longer.’

At the end of October, she sent T Fisher Unwin the manuscript of *Trooper Peter Halket*. Within a month, she had received a reply by wire. ‘Accept PH for publication STOP Propose lump sum of two thousand pounds STOP Discuss terms in London STOP’. To celebrate the good news Olive cooked up a special meal and Cron brought home a bottle of French wine. The photographic print she had retained in her possession, she would take it with her on the boat. She envisioned it as a frontispiece to her novella, if the publisher agreed.

November rolled into December, the veld grasses turned yellow and her garden dried up. There was no point, she thought, in trying to keep it alive when they would shortly be leaving Kimberley for Europe. Charles Webber had agreed to have Mill return to the farm for the duration. ‘He won’t be allowed to live indoors,’ warned Cron. ‘You’ve spoilt him.’

‘All life is precious, and a dog’s life no less so,’ she said. ‘Mill will adjust.’ She scratched the dog’s furry jaw and it licked her hand. Socrates was no longer a problem. They had arranged to have the monkey taken back to the wild, Mill giving it a ferociously yapping send-off.

In mid December, they booked their passage on the *Dunvegan Castle* to London for sailing early January. Olive sat down to write letters, announcing their departure to her family in Cape Town and arranging accommodation in London. Edith Lees-Ellis, she had heard from Havelock, had remained unwell and Olive had no wish to burden them, so she wrote to Alice Corthorn, suggesting that now she is in her new house in Kensington, would she welcome guests from South Africa? Olive knew that time was too short for Alice to reply, but she felt confident that Alice would respond according to her own needs, and take care to book them into a local hotel if necessary.

She received a letter in reply from her sister-in-law, Fan, inviting her and Cron to stay at Pine Grove while they waited to board the boat. They would be there for the festive season, Olive realised, and this concerned her enough to write to Fan again. She asked her sister-in-law to be frank in turn. They would be in the city for four days and she very much wanted to stay with the family, she said, to spend precious time with the children who, she imagined, will have grown much since she last saw them. However, she foresaw possible difficulties in the arrangement if Rhodes and his visitor from England (his sister apparently) should want to call at Pine Grove during these days of sociability. How did Fan feel about it? By return mail, Fan wrote she wouldn't hear of them staying anywhere else, that Billy and Dot and even little Oliver were ecstatic at the news of their Aunt's proposed visit. As an aside, Fan mentioned that Mr Rhodes had been called to London to face a Parliamentary Inquiry at Westminster, and would be traveling on the same boat leaving Cape Town. Olive's eyes glazed over and her heart leapt to her mouth. 'We can't be held responsible,' she muttered.

'What's that?' asked Cron, and she handed him Fan's letter. He read it and when he reached the last paragraph, she saw his face blacken. 'So, we have company.'

'Not the sort we would wish for. Rhodes will be perfectly charming, but he will be travelling with his henchmen, those low fellows like Metcalfe, and they may not be so friendly.'

'Best we keep to ourselves then. At least we will have Miss Molteno and Miss Greene with us,' said Cron. He handed her back the letter and returned to matters more immediate. 'Blessing has offered to mind the house during our absence.' Olive spun from one shock to another. She stared at him with her mouth open. It was not like Cron, she thought, to be so reckless.

‘But I have all my papers and books here. We cannot leave the house open and unattended,’ she said. She saw Cron’s face break into a sly grin. A smile was playing in his eyes.

‘And you,’ he said, ‘the upholder of equal treatment for the native. Would you feel the same if Charles Webber, or your librarian friend offered to mind the property?’ Olive struggled to reconcile the truth of what Cron had provocatively put before her, that her regard for the native as a man and a brother, required continual effort.

‘Blessing can’t even cook. He might set the house on fire!

Cron said, ‘l’ve spoke with Mattius, and he has offered to keep an eye on the house, and if Blessing wanted to help out at their place, they would feed him and give him a bed.’

‘Have you told Blessing?’

‘Yes.’

‘And…?’

‘Non-committal.’

‘Mm.’ She went to the kitchen to prepare their dinner and through the open shutters she could see Blessing at the wood-pile. He was balancing a log on the chopping block. She watched as his strong fore arm lifted the axe and struck a blow that split it clean. His broad shoulders bent forward to pick up a splinter, he whistled to Mill and tossed the stick high across the yard, the dog scrambling after it. It occurred to her that Blessing might prefer to be with his own people than with the coloured family. She thought of Charles Webber’s farm and his Kaffir servants who went about their work with proud reserve, much like Blessing. She would ask Cron.

Christmas was spent cleaning and sorting and Mill kept getting under Cron’s feet and yelping so he ordered the dog outside. Blessing had started the washing of clothes and linen early, so that they might dry before the midday heat scorched everything to a stiff board. Cron pulled down the canvas shades on the stoep and Olive potted about barefoot, moving from one room to another, making decisions about what to take and what to leave behind. The temperature climbed to one hundred degrees in the shade, pressing the earth into stillness. From the stoep, she watched Cron lead the mare out from the stable to the water trough and lassoe her to the railings under the mimosa tree. Blessing brought up a bucket and Cron, with unusual tenderness, brushed and washed her down. Tomorrow, he

would be parting with her. He had found a buyer in Kimberley who, he had assured Olive, was a decent fellow who treated his animals well.

She went into her study to write a letter to Will. She had resolved to lay it on the line to her brother whose position on the matter of Rhodes and the Jameson raid had never been made clear to her. She feared the blinkers had still not fallen from Will's eyes. She had been unsettled by a greeting card, post marked 'London' received a week before Christmas. It had come from Seymour Fort. He was home for the season, he scribbled on the inside, and he had enclosed a letter. Olive was delighted to hear from him, and it crossed her mind that should he remain in England in January, they could meet. But the tone of Seymour Fort's letter, as she read it, alarmed and saddened her. *You don't see that we must bring on a war now, and wipe the Dutchman out of South Africa once and forever.* She wondered how a man who had shown her friendship and sympathy for her work, and who had more than once expressed his dislike or distrust of Rhodes, could have allowed himself to become so unflinchingly a jingo, proselytising in the interests of the Chartered Company. It was almost too much to bear. Rhodes' power and influence, as she had tried to impress on WT Stead, was evil. She picked up her pen.

'Dear Will...In public Rhodes will go to Cape Town and talk dear old 'Afrikander' to you and Hofmeyr and you will be touched. In private he will haul up those jingoes and say that war is certain, and send them half mad with enthusiasm. There is coming for you and Hofmeyr, that keen, canny, old Dutchman, with not two grains of poetry and emotion in his nature, a big awakening. The spirit of the Lord is upon me and I could prophesy, but I refrain.'

Next morning, Olive handed her letter to her brother to Cron for posting. In writing it out, she had taken the opportunity to alert him to her forthcoming 'little book'. It was, she said, '…directed at the thinking English public who would be the final arbiters of South Africa's future.'

'We had better make a start,' said Cron, slurping the last of his tea. 'The train departs in two hours, and I want to make sure Blessing is allowed to board without me.' He went outside to harness the horse and Olive picked up Mill and tied a rope to his collar. She knew that he sensed some big event about to happen because he kept trying to pull away from her. He began to whimper. She stroked his head and the wiry fur on his back.

She spoke sternly. 'Now, you be a good boy for Blessing.' Olive had packed a food bag for her servant. He placed the food and a water bottle into an old sack that hung from his back. With his solid arms he picked up Mill and nuzzled the little dog affectionately.

‘Don’t worry missus, I’ll look after him.’

‘Mr Webber will be waiting for you at Cooktown. I hope you will be happy on the farm, Blessing.’

Standing in the yard she watched with a heavy heart as they pulled away. Her young servant with his old felt hat sitting up next to Cron in the trap, nursing Mill, the dog’s ears alert and poking skyward as she remembered them when she had first brought him home. She stayed a long time in the shade of the stoep watching the dust cloud move into the distance.

On the following day, Mattius arrived early to help Cron carry the cases to his cab. ‘Morning missus,’ he said to Olive. ‘Ready for the big journey?’

‘As ready as we can be, Mattius, thank you. How is your missus?’

‘Still in bed!’ He gave a guttural laugh. ‘While the baby sleeps, she sleeps.’

‘Very wise,’ said Olive.

‘Morning Mattius,’ said Cron, plonking down a large case, returning inside for another. Olive stepped off the stoep and wandered to the small plot of fenced red earth. There was no cross to mark the spot of the burial. Instead, she had planted flowers turning it into a proper little garden bed but the flowers were now drooped and withered. Cron had built a bird-bath so that the twittering of small birds, bee-eaters and fluff tails, might bestow on the site, a peaceful tranquility. The grave was still in shadow and her eyes were drawn to an orange sun cresting the horizon. It cast a purple hue across the red earth. The air was breathless on her skin. She splashed water into the bird bath knowing it would soon dry out. She spoke softly to her baby offering words of comfort and reassurance. She returned to the house and found Cron fitting padlocks to windows and doors. She saw that his clean shirt was already sweat stained. Mattius stood back, watching and reassuring that he would keep a close watch on the property. Cron had left the kitchen door open where she had earlier placed her bag of everything, including bottles of lemon water and biscuits to nibble on the train. She put on her bonnet and lifted her bag from the bench. She cast her eyes around without sadness.

By late afternoon of the same day, Cron, Olive and Will stood outside the big white house at Pine Grove, offloading their baggage from the hired Cape cart. Fan and the children came out to welcome them.

‘Oh, my, let me look at you,’ said Olive, holding the big ones at bay. ‘You’re almost as tall as me!’ she exclaimed to Billy. ‘And Dot, you’re not far behind.’ The children giggled. Oliver ran up and hid behind his sister’s skirts, and Olive laughed and made faces at him. She embraced Fan, and Cron kissed his sister-in-law. ‘How green everything looks,’ said Olive, gazing at the avenue of shading oaks. ‘One forgets living in the desert.’

‘We do our best,’ said Fan, bustling her guests inside. Will and the house-maid brought in the luggage. Soon they were sitting out on the wide stoep at the back of the house admiring the view to Table Mountain, watching the play of light and shade upon its rock face. An oily haze from the blue gums and pine trees at its base shimmered in the afternoon sun. Olive said she would like to walk there. ‘I’ll go with you,’ said Fan, disappearing inside. The servant brought out cool drinks.

‘Non-alcoholic beverages, I’m afraid old chap,’ said Will to Cron. ‘I’m on the wagon. Doctor’s orders.’ Olive had been shocked to see her brother at Adderley Street station, the strains of the past year sadly apparent. She thought him greatly aged, overweight, and his eyes looked tired. ‘Fan says that if I’m to suffer my guests should too,’ he said, with a rueful smile at his wife as she brought out a plate of must-flavoured rusks.

‘Not strictly true,’ Fan said. ‘We’ll have wine with our dinner and Will can have grape juice.’

‘At least you can pretend,’ said Cron, commiserating. The children frolicked on the lawn in front of them, Dot doing handstands, showing her knee length bloomers, and Billy climbing a Cape Lilac tree to sit above them on a sturdy branch.

‘Oliver has fallen asleep on his bed,’ said Fan. Olive chuckled.

‘The excitement too much for him, I suspect.’

When they went inside to sit down at table, Will took her aside. ‘Have you received Stead’s Christmas Annual?’

‘No. I told him to hold my copy for when I’m in London. Why?’

‘Take my copy. But I want your opinion before you leave,’ he said.

After a leisurely evening meal with Cape wine, Olive and Cron begged to be excused. ‘It’s been a long day for you both,’ said Fan. Will was on his feet and at the bureau, opening the front leaf. He handed Olive the promised magazine. On the frontispiece she read, *Christmas Edition, 1896.* And in bold was written***, The History of the Mystery.***

Cron crashed out but Olive stayed awake and with the side table lamp glowing she read Stead's account of the Jameson Raid. It was clear to her that WT Stead was trying to implicate the Colonial Office, in particular, the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. She wondered if this was Stead's attempt to take the heat off Rhodes before the Parliamentary Inquiry into the incident, met in London. The Raid had a history, was Stead's argument, that stretched back to the Chartered Company's acquisition, with Chamberlain's approval, of a strip of land on the southern border of the Protectorate of Bechuanaland, ostensibly to extend a railway coming from the Colony. Olive knew that it was through this corridor that Jameson had ridden towards the Transvaal border with his five hundred armed horsemen, a number of whom it was later revealed, were military police from Bechuanaland. She didn't doubt Stead's account and was glad that he was keeping the matter alive in the public mind. So, what of Will? Had Stead's revelations troubled her brother, she wondered. She turned down the lamp and in the darkened room watched the curtains billow to a wafting breeze.

She woke to the patter of little feet running up and down the passage outside her bedroom. Cron was awake, was washed and dressing for breakfast. She smiled at him, and he bent and kissed her. 'Good morning Mrs Cronwright-Schreiner; I think someone outside is trying to wake us up.'

'Open the door, Cron, and let him in.' Oliver stood at the open doorway with his thumb in his mouth. 'Hello, young man,' she said, hauling herself out of bed, and the boy raced away down the passage.

At breakfast Will seemed unresponsive to his guests, his heavy frame slumped in his chair. Cron finished his porridge and went outside to see Billy's tree house. Olive buttered her toast, ladling on a heaped teaspoon of grape jam. She paused and looked hard at her brother. He said, 'Did you read Stead's story?' Olive nodded and said she was pleased with the journalist's attention to the matter. 'Well, I'm not happy at the man's insinuation,' he said. She cocked her head, and he continued. 'That actions taken by the Colony's government were secretive and driven by ulterior motives,' he said. She saw the pain on her brother's brow.

'You're too sensitive, Will. I didn't read in Stead's article anything of the sort, and certainly nothing that implicated you.'

'My fear is that questions will be asked, ripped from their context, twisted and used for the bitterest party purposes,' he said darkly.

In the wake of the Raid, some parliamentarians had swapped allegiances. Two of the Progressives—Merriman and Sauer—now stood with the Afrikander Bond, while Rhodes had done the only thing possible following his demise from the Premiership and stayed with what remained of the loose, liberal Progressive coalition. The old oyster, Sprigg, had been returned to the top job.

'Oh, man! You were always too good to be a politician,' Olive cried. Will looked embarrassed and apologised for his moodiness.

'It's been like this for the past year, Olive, stepping on egg shells, treading water, not knowing which way to turn. And now we have an inquiry in Westminster to contend with.'

These few days in Cape Town were golden days for Olive. She succeeded in drawing Will out of himself with reminiscences—remember the ox wagon with its *voorkis* in front, its trap at the back, and its swaying *katel* heaped with pillows and blankets? And she played with the children and told little Oliver stories. The fine summer heat cooled by the port breezes kept her asthma away, and with Cron in tow, she shopped and visited the few old friends that remained in the city. Henry Loch was no longer Governor of the Cape, having sailed with his lady for the home country a year before and, it was rumoured, a departure engineered by Rhodes. Mary Sauer, too, was absent, traveling abroad with her sister. Olive and Cron paid the Rose-Innes a visit. Though Olive had tried, without success, to persuade Mr Rose-Innes to stick with those liberal colleagues in the House who had crossed the floor to sit with the Bond, she realised the man's rectitude prevented him from doing so. Rose-Innes was a third generation born champion of South African independence and for this reason alone, she had forgiven him his refusal to act. Mr Rose-Innes proudly showed Olive and Cron his new bicycle.

'Be careful as you go, it's not difficult to do oneself an injury,' warned Cron.

Over tea, Olive and Jesse exchanged information about their plans for their respective holidays abroad. The Rose-Innes were planning a visit to Europe later in the year. They would go to Germany, said Jesse.

On the day before departure, Cron went with Will and Billy to a cricket match, and Fan made good on her promise to Olive, and together, they walked on the Mountain. They talked about Will. It had been a dreadfully stressful year for him, said Fan, and she confided to Olive that she was concerned for his health. Olive commiserated. 'I'm concerned too, Fan, he doesn't look at all well.

Fan said, ‘If they call him to Westminster, it might break him.’

Olive was not so sure, she knew her brother to be a skilled advocate and was confident he would know how to engage with the Committee of Inquiry, how to handle probing questions and cross examination. To move Fan away from her gloom, Olive asked about Rhodes’ visitor from England, his sister, Miss Rhodes.

‘Edith is a most refined woman,’ Fan said. Olive was not surprised to hear it, but was glad all the same that their stay in Cape Town had not required them to meet with Rhodes or his sister.

In the early evening, Cron and Olive made their way to the Mount Nelson hotel in the downtown to rendevous with their traveling companions, Betty Molteno and Miss Greene, lately arrived from Port Elizabeth. The friends sat on the balcony under umbrella shades with a view to the dock and the *Dunvegan Castle,* the prized new ship of the Castle-line company, moored in readiness for tomorrow’s sailing. Cron ordered four glasses of champagne and they toasted in the New Year and their forthcoming journey. Their excited chatter about events in the Colony and abroad, died away in a restful haze of *bonhomie* when a chamber orchestra started up in the Palm Court. Olive leant back in her chair and closed her eyes and listened to the melancholy strains of a Bruch or a Brahms or an Albinoni. She felt a peace settle on her and a joy that she had not fully experienced since the birth of her baby.

As their hired cape cart closed in on the harbour, they could hear the clanking of the ship’s rigging irons, and Olive’s heart fluttered with excitement. The family poured out of their conveyance onto a dock abuzz with activity—passengers surrendering their luggage to porters who attached labels and raced them up the gang way, crowds gathering to see off loved ones, fruit sellers in ragged shirts and dirty trousers with their baskets aloft, strolling up and down. Will bought a bag of grapes for his ‘little sis’ and handed them to her, she thought, with an undiminished affection. She hugged the children before turning to her sister-in-law. ‘Fan dear, you have been so kind to us, I’m going to bring you something special home.’

‘And me, Aunty,’ cried Billy. ‘Will you bring me a soldier with a busby?’ Olive laughed and patted his head.

Will shook hands with Cron. ‘You may see me in London if I get called to the Inquiry.’

‘Well, be sure to let us know, you have our London address,’ said Cron.

They found their cabin on the 'hurricane deck' and unpacked their belongings. Olive stowed her rolled photographic print under her smalls in the cupboard drawer. She turned to Cron who was arranging his dinner suit onto a hanger. 'Do you think Will brought us down early to avoid meeting Rhodes?' She regretted that she had not shared with her brother the detail of her little book, its plot line and her motivation for writing it. He would, no doubt, read an extract in the *Cape Times* after its publication, and be unprepared for the fallout and recriminations that would inevitably follow.

Cron said, 'I'm sure that was his thinking. I didn't mind; gives us time to explore this splendid vessel without pushing against people.'

Stepping outside, they collided with a fellow passenger who, they learned, had taken up occupancy of the only other on-deck passenger cabin, squeezed between their own and the Captain's. He was a South African traveling solo and, it turned out, also an asthmatic. They invited him to join them for a drink in the saloon once the ship set sail.

'We have two lovely women friends who we have arranged to meet there.' said Olive.

They turned from the man and went below deck in search of the saloon and found it located next to the dining room. Then they found the library and made a quick inspection of its edifying collection of English classics. Back on deck at the stern end, they stumbled on the games area. Rubber balls were piled in baskets and quoits on poles stood in a row like sentinels. Cron went over to inspect, and she laughed. 'This is how you can spend the next twenty days,' she said. The funnels belched and Olive began to cough so they headed back towards their cabin.

Before they arrived, loud voices and angry tones reached them. It was their fellow passenger being escorted from his cabin by a ship's officer, and porters following up behind with the man's luggage. The officer was trying to console him.

'What's going on here?' said Cron.

'They've turned me out!' said the man. Cron tried to negotiate on his fellow passenger's behalf.

'This man is an asthmatic.'

'We know, Sir, we have offered him a large cabin mid-ship with window where he will be very comfortable.'

'Be it on your head if I end up in the sick room,' shouted the passenger.

Olive felt distressed. She sat on the bunk. 'I'll wager I know what this is about.'

‘I don’t know how they can turn a man out, if he’s bought his ticket,’ said Cron, ‘…not even for Rhodes.’

‘If it’s him, there will be money involved to be sure,’ she said, moving instinctively to the cupboard drawer where she had placed her print. Cron was pacing about, running his hand through his hair. She looked at him sorrowfully. ‘If it’s so, there is nothing we can do, best we ignore him altogether.’

They discovered soon enough that Olive’s prediction was correct. They met with the Misses Molteno and Greene when the ship pushed back from the harbour and hooted its way out of the channel, but the stranger who had been turned out of his cabin didn’t show, and they never saw him again. At dinner, they saw Rhodes and his party gathered together at one large table. Olive sat with her back to their table and Cron and Betty Molteno quietly rattled off the names of Rhodes’ company: Metcalfe, Earl Grey, Baden-Powell, Rhodes brother, Colonel Frank Rhodes and sister Edith, and another woman (who Olive later learned was Lady Grey), and the Editor of the *Cape Times*, Edmond Garrett.

‘His cheer squad,’ said Olive, helping her friends to creamed parsnip and potatoes.

The following days at sea, she held herself together through the awkwardness of the company, even when she was approached by Rhodes’ sister. Olive was sitting in the library reading and sensed someone standing in front of her. She looked up.

‘Miss Schreiner, I don’t believe we have met, may I introduce myself?’

Olive invited the handsome and well-groomed woman to sit down and she learned from Edith that ‘Cecil’, as she called her brother, wished to be friends with her and have some talks. ‘The problem is, he is afraid of you and he dares not even come and wash his hands in his own cabin for fear of meeting you.’ Olive guffawed at the suggestion.

‘I know you mean well, dear lady, but it is better we should not meet for if we do, I should attack him.’

‘Then, he has every reason to be afraid,’ said Edith with an amused grin. ‘I shall convey your wishes to my brother.’

A less than welcome approach came from Edmond Garrett, editor of the *Cape Times.* At first, he was polite and asked Olive how she was enjoying the crossing, then the name of Mary’s husband, John Sauer, made its way into their conversation. Mr Sauer, Olive knew, had suffered many insults from Rhodes’ supporters, even being accused of being a Dutchman (that he was not), after crossing the floor to sit with the Bond. Garrett sneered. ‘Mr Rhodes has his thumb on him.’ Olive stared at Garrett. ‘Oh yes, he has made

more money out of Rhodes than any man in South Africa.' Disgusted, she rose from her deck chair and walked away.

While Olive stayed mostly in her cabin to avoid approaches not only from Rhodes' party but from other passengers eager to introduce themselves to her, Cron played deck sports with Betty Molteno and Miss Greene. It was fine sailing weather up the West coast of Africa, 'the ship travelling at a speed of fifteen knots,' Cron was able to report when he returned to wash and dress for dinner. 'I had a chat with Captain Robinson, nice fellow, full of information.'

'Do you see Rhodes about?' she asked.

'Saw him today with that coloured Cape boy named Tony. They were sitting aft, smoking cigars. I ignored him.'

'I know the fellow, he was attending on Rhodes when I was at Groote Schuur.' She gazed distractedly out through the cabin window and saw a red sun sinking into the Atlantic. 'Oh, come and look at this Cron, how magical it is.' Cron picked up his camera.

Before they sat down to dinner, Cron said he would like to take a photo of the friends, and they agreed to his suggestion they stand by the flower arrangement next to the piano. As the short one, Olive was positioned in the middle. With much mirth between them, the women struck up elaborate poses for Cron, but he called a halt. He was searching for something in his camera bag. Looking puzzled and flushed, he said, 'I'm sorry ladies but I seem to have left the flash attachment in our cabin.' He excused himself, urging them to take their dinner seats and proceed to order.

Betty and Miss Greene made their selections from the limited offerings disguised in a menu of faultlessly spelled French. As they were both vegetarians, their choice was further limited. Cron had not yet returned so Olive ordered the cod for herself and the ribs of beef for him. Some fifteen minutes had passed before he reappeared in the doorway, ashen faced and frowning. He strode purposefully towards them and sat down just as their meals arrived. 'Did you find the flash?' Olive asked.

'I found more than the flash. But let's not spoil our dinner,' he said, forcing a smile. The ship rolled and the wine swished in their glasses. 'I've just been speaking with the Captain. We might be in for a rough night,' he said, and the women groaned in unison.

They had crossed the equator and were now a day out from the Cape Verde Islands. Clouds had gathered in the night sky blotting out the moon and it had begun to drizzle.

Olive clung to Cron as they zigzagged unsteadily along the slippery deck back to their cabin. Inside, they fell on their beds and she asked Cron to tell her what he had found.

'Tony, prowling about inside our cabin; I tossed him out and reported the trespass to the Captain.' Olive flew off the bed and went straight to the cupboard drawer. Opening it, her heart stopped as she rummaged through her clothes, the print was missing. 'It's alright, I've got it, I've put it in a more secure location.' She flopped on the floor putting her head in her hands.

'Oh, Cron, you frightened me!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

January 1897

The first-class carriage of the boat train to London was crammed with passengers and luggage, and smug with the scent of camphor from newly released winter coats and scarves. Olive and Cron's knees rubbed against those of their friends as they sat facing each other on wooden bench seats. The train gathered speed and Olive glanced at Cron who was gazing steadily out the window at the grey green wash of countryside, the denuded trees like ghosts in the mist. Miss Greene, sitting in the window seat opposite Cron, seemed to be equally absorbed in the scenes of English rural life flashing by. She lifted her gloved hand pointing at something and murmuring to him. Alice Greene was returning to the land of her youth after five years absent, and Olive, watching the watchers, was charmed by their mutual delight at being on English soil. She remembered the feeling well, and exchanged a knowing glance and smile with Betty.

They stood under the cantilevered roof of Paddington station and waited for their cases, all of them feeling a little wobbly on their feet. Pandemonium broke out as luggage was unceremoniously dumped on the platform amid incessant shouts from touts and cabbies, and passengers scrambling to find what was theirs. Betty Molteno and Miss Greene were transferring to a train for Cambridge to visit Miss Greene's mother. Their luggage secured, the four friends embraced their farewells and Olive and Cron followed a cabbie to his waiting taxi, bound for Kensington. Cron was agog at the sheer numbers of horses and carriages and omnibuses going hither and thither and when their taxi-cab swung by Buckingham Palace, Olive laughed and tucked her arm in close. 'Welcome to my London,' she said.

Alice Corthorn was waiting for them when they arrived at the brown stone terrace. 'I'm glad you've arrived. I'm going abroad myself tomorrow. At least there's time to show you how things work here.' Olive was surprised.

'Oh, Alice, this is not good news! We shan't see you. Where are you going and will you be back before we leave?'

The cabbie dropped their cases inside the door and Alice closed it against the chilling cold. 'India,' she said, leading her visitors indoors. A fire was burning in the living room and she invited them to warm themselves while she made tea. 'Difficult to

say for how long, I won't really know until I'm out there. Oh, and another thing,' she said on her way out to the kitchen, '…your imminent arrival in London has been announced.'

Olive called after her, 'Was it you, Alice?' She remembered a time when the naïve young Alice liked to draw attention to her association with 'the famous novelist'.

Cron raised an eyebrow. Glancing around the room, he went across to the medical science books lining the walls and Olive warmed herself before the fire. When Alice returned with a tray of tea, cups and buns she said, 'It's in the papers: Olive Schreiner, returns from South Africa! Nothing to do with me, I kept a cutting for you, think it may have been a publisher's announcement. Have you written another book?'

'Yes, that's why we're here, to see it through to publication, but enough of me,' Olive said, moving to an arm-chair. 'We're anxious to know what is taking you to India?'

'I've been invited by the Bombay Government to work with Professor Waldemar Haffkine in his laboratory there. Last year's plague wiped out half the population, and Haffkine is working on developing a vaccine. It is said he works so hard, one of his assistants had a nervous breakdown and another two quit.' Olive looked alarmed.

'Do you really want to work with this man?' Alice's face, she thought, was already showing strains of overwork.

'I couldn't be made to work any harder than I've been doing these past two years here in London. Besides, it's a great honour to work on such an important project. Haffkine is on the verge of a breakthrough. He has already inoculated himself.'

'That's dedication,' said Cron. 'He might yet sit alongside Lister in the annals of scientific discovery.' Alice gave Olive a complacent smile. She noticed that Alice didn't look at Cron when he spoke, it seemed that an awkwardness had established itself between them. She talked with Alice for an uninterrupted hour. Several times, Cron attempted to insert himself into the conversation, but Alice couldn't be drawn, addressing herself always to Olive. She wondered if Alice felt uncomfortable in the presence of a man wearing bush boots and a rough woollen jacket. Or was it simply because Cron was every inch a man? In a peremptory manner, Alice stood, saying she wanted to show them the house and the room she had prepared. She led them to a back room. 'I thought it best to put you in here, it's close to the bathroom,' she said, '…and if people arrive who you have no wish to see, you can hide.' She dipped into her dustcoat pocket and withdrew a bunch of keys. 'You're here for a month, aren't you?'

'Yes, and then we go to Paris,' said Olive.

‘Paris? Perhaps you would like to call on my friends at the Lister Institute. I’ll give you some names.’

When Alice Corthorn left for the hospital, Olive suggested to Cron they rug up and take a walk, through Hammersmith down to the Thames. Stepping out, the bracing cold took their breath away, and they saw the high reach of St Mary Abbott’s spire pushing through a foggy sky. The weak sun had almost disappeared when they reached the bank. The Thames, silvery in the half-light, lapped at the walls. They stood and watched small boats plying the river. After a time, she said, ‘Alice is a remarkable woman. I can’t believe she is the same girl who I knew thirteen years ago. Then, she desperately needed my help. She doesn’t seem to need anybody’s help now.’

Cron wrapped his scarf close so that it formed a muffle around his face. ‘Don’t you think we should be getting back?’ he said. She slipped her arm into his and they turned and retraced their steps.

Next day, they went with Alice in the cab to Paddington station. Cron took charge of her suitcase and Olive told her friend she was always happy to indulge in the thrill of arrivals and departures. More than this, she hoped that Alice would see their going with her to the station as a gesture of appreciation for the use of her house. At the platform gate, a porter took the luggage from Cron, checking that it was correctly labelled. Alice turned to Olive. ‘We do keep missing each other, don’t we? Last time you were here I was in Paris.’

Olive reached up cupping Alice’s rosy cheeks in her hands. ‘Take very good care dear; don’t overwork, bring me something nice, and get yourself inoculated before you go anywhere near the plague!’ Cron wished Alice a *bon voyage,* but she had already turned away from them.

Olive was going to meet Thomas Fisher Unwin to settle terms for publication. From Kensington to the Strand was a distance too far for her to walk, she told Cron, so they took an omnibus that skirted Hyde Park and followed around the Palace. The weather was dry and they sat in the open top to allow Cron to take in the layout of the city. She had rolled in her bag her photographic print. ‘I wonder what will be his reaction,’ she said.

‘The book stands without it, Olive. Best not to get your hopes up.’ She glanced at him, thinking it not like Cron to be pessimistic and she wondered who of them was the more anxious. It was clear to her that Cron saw her meeting with the publisher as a big event. It wasn’t just the prospect of a substantial boost to their finances—though the offer

of two thousand pounds had freed her husband from worry—rather, Olive saw in Cron a rediscovered sense of pride in her worth as a writer, and this pleased her. The bus took a turn down by the Embankment and they saw fires burning in rusting metal tubs and the chestnut sellers with mittens cut off at the fingers counting out roasted nuts into small paper packets. The wafting smell made them hungry.

'We'll go for lunch at Covent Garden, I know just the place,' she said, smiling at him brightly. Cron walked with her to the publishing house but said he would not go in. He pointed to a coffee house on the opposite side of the road.

'I'll wait for you there.'

'How do I look? she said.

'Cold!' He said, and Olive laughed. Making her way up the stairs she turned her head back but Cron had already disappeared into the crush of traffic.

Mr Fisher Unwin was with another client, his secretary said, and invited Olive to sit. A young woman flounced out past her and when the publisher appeared Olive stood and held out her hand. 'Olive Schreiner,' she announced. Mr Fisher Unwin took her hand welcoming her to London.

'Well Miss Schreiner, we have communicated many times, but now I have the pleasure of meeting you in person.' Olive wondered why she hadn't called on him when last she was in London. It was remiss of her, she thought. 'Won't you come in and we'll have some tea.' Nodding to his secretary, he stood back and directed Olive towards his office. It was a small room piled high with books and bulging manila folders, a scatter of papers lay on the publisher's desk. She looked around before sitting down. There was a connecting door, closed, and she wondered if it led to the printing press. Mr Fisher Unwin hurried in and sat down at his desk facing her.

'We do think your novella worth publishing, especially at this time of heightened interest in South African affairs. It will likely sell quite well.'

'Have you given it to readers?' she asked.

'Yes, the reviewers were very encouraging. I even gave it to my wife to read but swore her to secrecy. She's a Liberal politician, you know.'

'No, I didn't. That was taking a risk, wasn't it?' she chuckled. He smiled thinly.

'Well, it is about the risk that I want to speak with you, Miss Schreiner, before we send it to press. We suggested, I think, to pay you a lump sum for a transfer of copyright to us, reserving the American copyright to you.'

‘Yes, you said two thousand pounds.’ Fisher Unwin stroked his neatly clipped ginger beard and looked at her from across the top of his steel-rimmed spectacles.

‘It was my wife, actually, who said we would be opening ourselves to a libel action if we printed the book as is, and I have to say, I agree with her.’ As she watched him dart across the room to a filing cabinet, her stomach tightened. He withdrew a folder and carried it back to his desk. She saw her name written in large lettering on the cover. He opened it. ‘You see, Miss Schreiner, we feel it would not change your story in the slightest if you were to remove a few passages, and I have highlighted these and would like you take a look.’

Now it was more like a kick to the stomach. She stood up and paced the small square of floor available to her. ‘Mr Rhodes and the Chartered Company, I suppose?’ she said. She sat down again and struggled for a dignified calm. ‘Mr Fisher Unwin, I appreciate your interest in my little book but if you do not wish to publish it then I shall be forced to take the manuscript elsewhere.’ She felt bold but knew she was taking an enormous risk. Who else with a reputation to match Fisher Unwin would be prepared to publish? However, her intuition told her that this publisher was running hot and wanted her manuscript. ‘You must know, Sir, it would be impossible for me as an artist to change one word of what I have written at the behest of someone else. It would destroy the purity of the work.’ She lifted her bag onto her lap. ‘There is something I would like to show you. A photograph I found in South Africa, taken during the Matabele War. I have imagined it as a frontispiece to the book. It may help you decide.’

The publisher studied the photograph. ‘Yes, I think we should most definitely use the photo as a frontispiece. He turned it over. There is no name on this print. Do you know its provenance?

‘No. It was in a shop window in Kimberley.’ Fisher Unwin appeared to hesitate before he spoke. ‘Using the photo without acknowledging its source may add to our troubles, Miss Schreiner.’

Olive’s unease was growing. ‘But the photo is the evidence you need to protect you from a libel action, surely? She said. The publisher looked hard at her for a moment then, allowed a smile to cross his face.

‘I have had my secretary draw up a contract, Miss Schreiner, based on my own expectation that you would refuse to make changes to the manuscript.’ Digging deeper into the folder, he withdrew a typed document and handed it to her. Her eyes went straight to the sum of money offered before she read the fine print. It had shrunk to one thousand,

four hundred pounds. Her heart began to race. She felt mortally wounded, and was momentarily tempted to ask him to return her manuscript and walk out.

'This is a blow to me. I'll need to discuss it with my husband before I sign the contract as written. He is a lawyer.' Fisher Unwin's eyes narrowed.

'Oh? I thought he was a farmer.'

'He is both, Sir.'

Making her way out of the building and across the Strand, hurt and indignation burned Olive's insides. Cron was standing at the coffee-house door and waved to her. Resuming his table, they sat and he asked how it had gone with the publisher.

'We've just lost six hundred pounds!' She said.

'I should have come with you. I fear he has bullied you, Olive. I expect its risk money he's keeping for himself, am I right?' Olive burst into tears and he dug in his pocket for his handkerchief. She blew her nose and nodded.

'He asked me to remove some passages.' Her voice quivered and she staunched her sobbing. 'Of course, I couldn't do that. I would rather the story not be published than to change a single word. I've told him I will take it elsewhere.'

'You haven't signed, then?'

'I told him I had to speak to my lawyer!' She smiled forlornly at Cron. 'I said you were a lawyer, but had quite forgotten the story about us that Stead published after we were married.' He grimaced. She said, 'On the plus side, I've retained the copyright for publication in America, and he's going to use your photograph for the cover.' She looked earnestly at Cron. 'Tell me please, honestly, what do you think? Should we walk away?'

Cron frowned, and she could see his rational, practical mind at work. He said, 'If it is my opinion you really want, Olive, then I think you should go back in there and accept what has been offered.'

Olive's days and weeks in London passed in a deluge of visitors and visiting. Her book was out before they learned that her brother, Will, had been called to give evidence at the House of Commons Enquiry into the Jameson Raid. Fisher Unwin gave prominence to *Trooper Peter Halket* in its listing of new books, but she avoided reading the reviews in the London papers, urging Cron to show her only those that were favourable. They mostly were, one critic even suggesting Olive Schreiner had written a 'modern gospel'.

Whether it was this particular review or her own profile as a writer sympathetic to the downtrodden that had brought a request from the Reverend Wilberforce, Canon of Westminster Abbey, to pay homage to her with a visit, she couldn't be sure, but she was delighted and she replied immediately.

'Perhaps he's read your book already,' suggested Cron.

'Then it will make him sad and he will wonder what his grandfather ever achieved,' she said. It had never occurred to her that Canon Wilberforce might have been an appreciative reader of her essay on the 'Problem of Slavery', an essay she had kept to herself for fear of it being misused.

Cron welcomed His Grace to Russell Street. He was an older man, tall and spare and slightly stooped with a high forehead of receding hair. He was wearing his clerical collar and black cassock, over which he had thrown a winter cape. Cron relieved him of the cape and invited him into the sitting room where a fire was lit. Olive stood and held out her hand. At first, they exchanged pleasantries, on their observations of the splendid new spire on St Mary Abbott's church, and how London had changed little since Olive had first lived here except, she noted, there was more traffic. In short time, however, they were both commiserating on the world's dispossessed. Canon Wilberforce spoke with a deep gravity, and she discovered not only that he was a writer himself, but a man of high intelligence. 'I've read the reviews of your book,' he said. 'Please tell me about South Africa, and what you believe is the cause of its troubles?' Olive was direct.

'Mammon,' she said.

'It seems to me, Mrs Schreiner, that the country is suffering a moral decadence and in need of a spiritual awakening.'

'I agree wholeheartedly, your Grace. But we are a cursed country. Our mineral wealth, our diamonds and our gold, brings out the worst in men.' Olive saw sadness in the Canon's eyes, as if he understood too well the root cause of human suffering.

Before he left them, Canon Wilberforce gave Olive a book he had written called 'Spiritual Consciousness'. 'If you can't bring about a moral uplifting of the nation Mrs Schreiner, no one can. I hope you find inspiration in this little book. God be with you dear woman.'

The Canon's visit was followed by that of another divine—a leading Wesleyan—the Reverend Hugh Price Hughes. This encounter was less formal, for Olive had conversed with men of the low churches in South Africa, and she was able to speak about

her father's work as a missionary and his conversion to the Wesleyans, '…made on a matter of doctrine and principle after examining his views in the sight of God,' she said.

'And you, Mrs Schreiner, you're a Free thinker I've heard?'

'It is organised religion I object to, Reverend, not God. Truth resides in our spiritual connection to the natural world. The Universe is one and it lives. In older phraseology, I might say there is nothing but God.'

'Then you're a spiritual seer, Mrs Schreiner, you have the force,' said the Reverend. When Olive glanced his way, she saw Cron looking at her with a kind of wonderment that she had not seen since their wedding day.

Two days later, when Olive and Cron were preparing to leave 19 Russell Street for the Continent, she received a missive from WT Stead, threatening a visit. She wrote immediately in reply. 'You had better come tomorrow if you want to see me.'

Stead blustered in the next day, hugging Olive and Cron, and swearing that he had never heard such garbage coming out of Chamberlain's mouth. 'Claims he knew nothing about the Raid! Rhodes has offered to play the sacrificial lamb to protect him.'

The Parliamentary Enquiry into the Jameson Raid had got underway shortly after Olive's arrival in London, the Colonial Secretary appointing himself to the Committee and Rhodes giving evidence, avoiding hard questions and charming even the Opposition members it was said. She looked at Stead and could almost have laughed; his eratic manner, his nervous energy, had not changed since last she saw him nine years ago.

'How do you know this?' she said.

'Rhodes told me. Those cables between Cape Town and the Colonial Secretary will never see the light of day.'

'Why so pessimistic?' said Olive, who held firmly to the view that British justice would eventually succeed in exposing Rhodes and his powerful backers.

'Rhodes has got him by the short hairs, and Chamberlain dare not admit to anything. This whole Enquiry is a white wash!' he rasped. On his way out, Stead hesitated at the door. 'If you should see Rhodes, best not to mention you've seen me.' Olive realised that Stead's truculent mood was directed at the Colonial Secretary and not Rhodes who, it appeared, the journalist was still in contact with and on friendly terms. As a parting gesture, he added, 'Your little book; brilliantly written.'

Now, she began to pin her hopes on Will's forthcoming evidence before the Committee, and she wrote him a letter, pressing on him the foul deeds she had experienced

coming from Rhodes' party on board ship. 'Dear Laddie' she had addressed him, knowing that when he arrived in London, she and Cron would be in Italy. She left both her letter and a copy of her new book at Morley's Hotel where she knew he would be staying.

Three months later…

Olive and Cron travelled down to Cornwall to stay with the Ellises. Happy to be back on English soil after their whirlwind trip on the Continent, she thought Cron, too, was happy to once again be with people who spoke his language. 'England is always beautiful in May,' she said, and Cron agreed, 'It's certainly green.' As they made their way by donkey cart from the Tintagel siding, she imagined the hours of thoughtful and intelligent conversation that lay ahead. Havelock had held resentments about her leaving him when she first returned to South Africa, but about her marriage, she believed he did not. She was pleased at their having being invited to Cornwall, sure that her love for both men would carry over to an affection they would feel for each other in the coming days.

They stood with their cases in a garden smelling sweet with flowering honeysuckle and jasmine and awash with the colour of climbing sweet pea when Mrs Ellis—Edith Lees—opened the blue door of the white washed cottage. Olive could not contain her joy and rushed forward. 'Edith, dear! And your garden is looking so lovely.' The woman's pale blue eyes came alight and she welcomed her guests, ushering them through the cottage to an outdoor space at the rear where Havelock was reading under an ivy-covered canopy.

'Dear Olive,' he said jumping up. 'I didn't hear you arrive, my humble apologies.' She watched Havelock shake hands with Cron and she knew by their warm smiles and Havelock's attention to her husband that a mutual admiration and affection had already established itself. They were not the only guests at the cottage, a waif like young woman appeared in the garden and was introduced to them as Lily. 'Our dear friend,' said Edith, 'Lily is an artist who lives in St Ives. She is here to put the finishing touches to her portrait of Harry.' Lily made an instant impression on Olive, for her beauty and her appealing naturalness of manner. It came as no surprise, when Lily addressed them, to hear the musical patois of the Celt.

'I've given you my bedroom, I'm sleeping in the studio,' she said. Olive protested and Lily and Edith reassured her that it was where Lily preferred to be when she was so close to finishing her work. Jauntily, Lily said, 'It's where I must go now.'

Over tea and cheese scones, Olive asked Edith had she finished her novel begun when they met in ’94 and Edith said she was on the last chapter. ‘That’s wonderful news. Have you settled on a title?’

‘I’ve called it ‘Seaweed: A Cornish Idyll’.’

‘You’re living your book, in this lovely part of England,’ said Olive. Edith gave her a faltering smile, and shifted their attention to her husband’s recent achievement.

‘Harry has just submitted to the publisher his first study on the psychology of sex.’ Havelock demurred. ‘We don’t have to talk about me.’

‘You are too modest, Harry!’ exclaimed Olive. ‘I don’t believe we would have known about it otherwise. I hope you will send us a copy when it’s out.’ The Ellises wanted to hear about their travels in Italy, especially Edith who said she had never been further abroad than Paris. Cron was happy to oblige and opened, telling them about their visit to Vesuvius.

‘We went right to the rim. Olive got herself carried up but had to go down again because of the sulphur. It was the highlight of our trip, for me at least,’ he said, and Olive concurred that it was indeed a spectacular sight,

‘Clouds of smoke and stones going up; and deep down the internal artillery,’ she said.

‘And did you go to Amalfi?’ asked Edith.

‘An impressive coastline, but in my opinion, it doesn’t compare with the Cape Peninsular drive to Chapman’s Peak,’ said Cron, with unabashed pride. Olive glanced at Havelock who was smiling graciously, and with the same equanimity that had always been his mark, followed up with questions about the Cape Colony. She wondered why Havelock had never come out to South Africa. Perhaps, she thought, his thirst for adventures south of the equator had been quenched by a youthful four years spent in New South Wales. He had become a serious man of the study and it was, she thought, unlikely he would ever leave England now.

When later next day, Havelock had sat for the last time in the artist’s chair, and they had a ceremonial unveiling of his portrait with the opening of a bottle of cider, Olive’s opinion of Lily as a creative soul after her own heart, dissipated. She whispered to Cron, ‘It looks nothing like Harry!’

Havelock wanted Olive to see his miners’ hut, where he did most of his writing, he said. Edith and Lily stayed behind at the cottage and Olive and Cron walked with him to the bay. The hut sat close to the cliff edge. Its slanting slated roof, she thought, created an

illusion that it was ready to slip into the ocean. Havelock turned the key and they went inside. 'No need for artificial light,' he said, pointing to the skylight above their heads, 'These summer nights are special, they allow me to work late.' She glanced at his desk, his papers and his books, and then took up a seat in the hammock chair outside the hut to marvel at the view. Havelock said, 'Edward Carpenter says its one of the finest views in England.'

'It is indeed a magnificent view,' said Cron, wandering off to explore an old slate shaft behind the hut.

'How is Ed?' Olive asked.

'See him occasionally in London. I know he had some trouble with his heart, but I believe it was nothing too serious.'

'Yes, he wrote me about that.' She looked at her friend, leaning against the wall of his writer's retreat. He seemed so contented. 'I do envy you, Harry, to be able to escape from people to this sanctuary of uninterrupted peace and quiet,' she said.

The weather in Cornwall was perfect, and in the lengthening twilight it was easy for them to follow the cobbled path that led to the cottage gate. Havelock asked if they would like to visit the castle. It was agreed they go in the morning before the sun and the tide were high. That evening, after their supper, Havelock produced a copy of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King,* and in the fading light, lamps were lit and they each took a turn to read from the laureate's cycle of narrative poems.

The blackened ruins of Tintagel castle brooded over the coast. From where they stood, they could see Merlin's Cave, a sandy cove at its mouth and, as Tennyson had described it, the baby Arthur washed upon the sandy floor, the druid shaman carrying the infant to safety. Cron helped the women across the slate and volcanic rock of the island, and Havelock waited for Olive coming up behind. 'Where is the line between history and legend?' she asked him, holding out her hand. The sun, rising in the east, caught in his thick mop of hair and with his long stringy beard, she thought Havelock could pass as the wizard himself. He took her hand.

'There is no line, all history is legend,' he said. She thought it a charming idea.

After they had explored the ruin, most of the party were keen for a walk along the cliff edge; Edith wanted to collect wildflowers. Olive chose not to go, she would rest on the grassy knoll and wait their return, she said. Losing sight of her companions as they followed around a bend on the narrow gravel path, she cast her gaze across the rugged

terrain of caves and islands and peninsulas. She watched the seagulls soring above, caught in the updrafts from the ocean below, and thought how much nicer were the calls of English gulls than the squawking birds at the Kowie. Their soft cawing had woken her early that morning, and Cron's gentle snoring beside her. Since being in Cornwall, there was no hint of the asthma that had plagued her in Rome and Florence, and she felt the supreme pleasure of being with people to whom one can talk freely on all matters, and be understood.

The dawning had come to Olive slowly and painfully that it was here, in England, that she felt in touch with her real self, her self of old. Sitting on the grassy knoll, She traced back over her and Cron's months moving around Europe, and she wondered if it had been in Alassio that the seed of this realisation had been sown. She had taken Cron to see Santa Croce, the ruined chapel at the end of the promontory. They borrowed bicycles and rode out along the old Roman road. Olive rested, as she had many years before, in the chapel's stone porch. Cron was scouting for something in the surrounding bushes and she heard the cracking of sticks underfoot grow more distant. Left alone, she relived the emotional agony she had felt when she first fled London and the heartache that love brings. She remembered how she had found solace in her writing and the will to keep going. Another remembered sensation—lain dormant these years past—had come to her. Vitality!

Now, as she sat one leg flopped over the other, basking in the soft morning glow, a wisp of cooling Atlantic breeze on her face, it was as if she moved not only in two hemispheres but between two worlds; '…and never the twain shall meet,' she murmured. She asked herself, what good could she do in South Africa since Rhodes had been exonerated and was planning his triumphant return there? She knew war was coming. Since the burking of the Enquiry, it was beyond prophesy. She felt proud of Will when she read in the papers his witness statement; he had stood fast, yet in the end to no avail. In her disgust at the Committee's findings she was not alone. She knew that here in England and in Europe she would be one of a chorus of voices howling protest should the Imperial government declare war against the peace-loving Boers. Even WT Stead was wavering after Rhodes apparently dismissed him as an executor of his Will, a fact Olive did not know until she read Stead's letter delivered to her in Rome. She had thought this hilariously funny that the great manipulator had been forced to find ways other than an inducement of company shares or cash, to win favour with a journalist moral to the core.

Olive's mind flicked to Cron. She doubted he would stay, but would he understand? Her dear old husband had given her so much, could she dare to risk losing his love forever? How to put it to Cron in the gentlest way exercised her mind. It remained to Olive a matter of great pride that her marriage be a success, yet here she was silently plotting to deliver it a blow from which it may never recover. She saw distant heads bobbing along the cliff path back towards her. The practicalities of what was possible and what was best for her future as an artist—she would propose it to him thus.

When they returned to the cottage there was a letter waiting, addressed to Olive and forwarded onto her by her publisher. Cron stayed talking with Lily in the kitchen while the Ellis's and Olive moved outside to sit in the garden. She opened the letter. It was from a Mr John A Hobson, a political economist apparently, working for the *Manchester Guardian.* He had heard she was in England and would like to discuss with her the South African situation. He was working on a theory, he said, linking speculative overseas investments by the financial sector to political territorial expansion. Her heart jumped. She had never met this man or heard of his theory, yet she felt an immediate connection. She had vividly intuited much the same idea when she learnt of the whitewash in Westminster, and had sent a letter to John Merriman: 'Something in our society has formed which has fed, nourished and built up such a man as Rhodes. If he were to die tomorrow, would anything change? There would always be the Chamberlains, Churchills and Rothschilds.' In her letter to Merriman, she had termed it 'the matrix'. She looked up at Havelock who was resting his head on the chair back, his eyes closed against the sun. 'You see,' she said, leaning forward inviting him to read Hobson's letter. 'You wonder why I get excited and rush out wildly and fight.' He opened his eyes and with a bemused expression he took the letter and read through. Handing it back to her, he said.

'How interesting.' Olive's jaw dropped. She looked at Edith and then at Havelock.

'Is that all you can say, Harry, "How interesting"? In time of revolution or war, you will never be at the barricades.' He appeared startled as though she were accusing him of some character deficiency. She quietened and gave him a rueful smile. 'That is your greatness, old boy, your absolute absence of enthusiasm for it.'

Olive sent Hobson a letter in reply saying they would be returning to London in one week by today's date and he could find her at Morley's Hotel, off Trafalgar Square. In two weeks the *Tantallon Castle* would sail for the Cape and Olive wanted her husband to meet other of her old friends before he left England. Edward Carpenter was down in

London for the launch of his latest literary offering to the world, and Adela and Connie were coming with Lady Loch and her twin sister, up to London from whence they would be leaving for their annual sojourn on the Continent. Olive spent her last days in Cornwall taking excursions, engaging in thoughtful conversation with the Ellis's, and imagining her separation from Cron. In the convivial company and holiday spirit at the cottage, her courage to speak it, however, failed her. In London, she thought, options could be thoroughly talked through and the best of these, sensibly settled on.

The Ellises and Lily saw them off at St Ives station. Tunnelling along the Great Western railway line, Olive's heart ached to unburden itself. The man sitting beside her, her husband, her lover and her chum, she wanted to believe would take it in his stride. *Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest,* said the King to his Guinevere. Cron was looking out the window at waves smashing against the sea walls. He made some comment about Brunel's engineering feat in building a line that so closely hugged the coast. 'Not a coast to compare to the beauty of South Africa's,' he said in afterthought. Several times on the journey, she slipped her arm through his and rested her head on his shoulder. It was Olive's way of reassuring them both that it would be alright.

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School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

Between Scholarship and Imagination: A Fictional Interpretation of the South African Writer and Social Theorist Olive Schreiner, 1855-1920.

Janice Leonie Caulfield

0000-0002-8041-1074

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INTRODUCTION

It is one hundred years ago that Olive Schreiner passed from this world, leaving behind her words in novels, short stories, essays, theoretical treatise, and letters. A South African born woman of English and German descent, internationally recognised as the first novelist of major importance to emerge from the Cape colony, Schreiner lived during tumultuous times: a period of great advance in social and scientific discoveries, lethal struggles between empires over territory, and the transition of South Africa from a collection of separate states and colonies to a single unitary nation, though one that excluded from its power sharing arrangements the majority of its population. She was an unusual woman for her time: a feminist, pacifist and socialist, who lived her adult life between two worlds, London—the metropolitan centre of Empire—and Britain's Cape Colony. Following the success of her first novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, published in London in 1883, Olive Schreiner was embraced by English literati and intellectuals, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Karl Pearson and Eleanor Marx among them. She embedded herself in London's debating societies, such as the Fellowship of the New Life (forerunner of the Fabian Society), and the Men and Women's Club, a utopian project for a new understanding of heterosexual relations that flourished in the 1880s. She befriended journalists and politicians including W.T. Stead (champion of the 'new journalism'), and William Gladstone, Prime Minister of Britain.

I had been following Olive Schreiner years before I decided to write about her. On a first visit to South Africa I read *The Story of an African Farm,* and on a self-drive through its heartland—an area known as the Karoo—I stumbled on the Schreiner museum in the town of Cradock. Later, in a local library in London, I read a volume of Schreiner's collected letters. It was a reference to Schreiner in Jill Roe's biography of Miles Franklin that had sent me on this path. Miles Franklin's period in London during the Great War had overlapped with Olive Schreiner's, and I wondered if they had met. Reading Schreiner's letters and the work of her first biographer—her husband, Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner—I became fully absorbed in the life of this remarkable woman from history. Perhaps it was her pacifist stand during the Great War, her willingness to speak out for humanity, an apparently lone voice of protest that resonated with me. Hers was not, however, the only voice of protest (the philosopher Bertrand Russell, and the writer Vernon Lee were among those who spoke against the War) but in the passions of war and patriotism Schreiner, like other pacifists or critics, suffered abuse.

What was it about this woman who seemed so driven by her ideals that she was prepared to put herself in the firing line, in one incident, being turned out of her accommodation because of her German sounding name, and in another being called a traitor to her face? I read that she had made a deputation to the war-time Prime Minister Lloyd George and argued strenuously with him. She lacked inhibition then. I learnt other things about her. She suffered chronic asthma, she had lost an only child years before, and I wondered how these personal sufferings might have shaped the woman, her politics and her writing.

Since her death, Schreiner's works and life have attracted much scholarly attention, including multiple biographies, literary analysis, and feminist history, but to date no book-length fictional narrative of the woman has appeared[i]. This was my challenge, to write a novel about a famous woman writer from history. My creative production 'A Woman of Passion' aims to be the first published fictional account of Olive Schreiner. I could have chosen any one of many parts of her intriguing life to write about, but the period following her return to South Africa after almost nine stimulating years living abroad, I felt held the most potential for an imaginative work. I wanted to know how she fared in returning to a colonial outpost, removing herself from the centre of Empire and its heartbeat, and how this displacement impacted her writing, and her love life. Excluding the first biography written by her husband, most of Schreiner's biographers (eight published between 1949 and 2013) have failed to answer adequately questions about these early returned years, especially the first years of her marriage which occurred four years after her return to South Africa[ii].

It seemed to me that the above vague accounts of these years deserved closer attention. I believed that I could find better ways to fill the gaps, the erasures, not simply by reporting the outer world, but by imagining my subject in the interstices between events. In the silences, what did she feel and think? This was my second challenge, to explore the value of a genre of fiction that has become known as 'the biographical novel'. The problem for biographers is that they must deal in the realm of fact (though see a discussion of speculative biography below), limited in what can be said about their subject by the evidence available to them. Fiction writers, on the other hand, can imagine the interior life of their subject so that people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader. Using a 'responsible imagination' (Styron, cited in Lackey, 2016), the biographical novelist will adhere to the

[i] Stephen Gray's one actor play about Schreiner, and Ann Harries novel 'Manly Pursuits' about Cecil Rhodes that includes Schreiner as one of its characters, are fictionalized exceptions.

[ii] Three biographies—Hobman (1955), Berkman (1979), and Schoeman (1992)—dip into the relationship.

evidence no less than an historian or biographer, but s/he can also write about the hidden life: the dreams, joys, sorrows and self-communing of their subject.

Following the line of argument made by Milech and Schilo (2009) that the exegetical and creative component of the research thesis should be 'conceptualized as independent answers to the same research question', I formulated my research questions to reflect the component parts of the thesis as follows:

The Research Questions

Question 1 *How can biographical fiction enhance what we know about an historical figure from the biographical record?*

The definition of knowledge (and to know) in the Oxford English dictionary is 'familiarity gained by experience', 'to be acquainted with (thing, place, person)',and a 'person's range of information'. In this exegesis I will argue that the novel form with its literary devices, combined with authorial experience, is a unique medium that carries emotional power and imagination for the writer and reader, enabling a deeper understanding of the subject than that offered by biography.

Question 2 *On what grounds can the fictional narrative form defend itself as an authentic interpretation of a life?*

The concept of authenticity has multiple meanings and applications. At its simplest it means 'genuine', but 'original', 'authoritative', 'reliable', 'trustworthy' are other terms often used to describe something as authentic (Newman & Smith, 2016). Authenticity of a biographical novel can be measured in three ways: i) spatial-temporal authenticity (historical time and place), ii) biographical authenticity (the subject and her context faithfully portrayed), and iii) as measured against the standard of the canon, that is, the traditional demands of the novel form (Cuddon, 2013). How to measure the authenticity of a fictional account, an imaginative work, about a real historical figure is complicated by what appears to be conflicting expectations. The authenticity of art, for example, implies originality, and in the case of fiction, it implies the artist has used her creative imagination, drawing on novelistic devices to tell a story. However, can such a work be trusted as a reliable interpretation of the subject's life? Trustworthiness implies that the author has worked within the framework of the facts. In this exegesis I will argue that authenticity can be claimed for a biographical novel on both measures if the novelist follows the same research rigour as an

historian or biographer, and applies integrity and devotion to the subject in her creative endeavour.

A Note on Terminology

In this exegesis, I use both terms 'genre' and 'form' in reference to biographical fiction. At times I use an abbreviated term for biographical fiction, namely, 'bio-fiction'. I have chosen to use the term 'biographical', rather than 'historical' or 'archival' fiction to avoid confusion, but each of these genre terms is equally relevant to the act of writing fictionalised narratives of past lives.

In addition to an Introduction and Conclusion, the Exegesis is divided into four chapters as follows:

1. Literature Review of Key Debates about Biographical Fiction.
   The purpose of this chapter is to expose, through an exploration of key debates, the troubling questions of truth and authenticity for the genre. It also examines efforts by scholars to map out distinguishing elements of the genre.
2. Olive Schreiner's writing, politics and personal life.
   This chapter interrogates the biographical record and makes the case for a bio-fictional narrative that can transcend the limits and constraints of traditional biography, and open up possibilities for a deeper understanding of my subject.
3. Textual Comparison of two Bio-fiction novels.
   This chapter compares two novels about the life of the nineteenth century writer Henry James. Colm Toibin's *The Master,* served as a model for my own creative production. The other is David Lodge's *Author Author*. I examine the different approaches taken by each author to the same historical personage, the novelistic techniques they have used, and how each understands their composition in terms of debates about the genre covered in Chapter One.
4. The Creative Writing Process: Constructing my vision of Olive Schreiner.
   This chapter sets out to show three things: i) Choices made in creating my bio-fiction; ii) The ways in which the narrative reveals truths that enhance our knowledge of Olive Schreiner; and iii) How the work meets the various standards for authenticity expected of bio-fiction novels.
5. Conclusion: Here, I review my findings and consider the contribution that this thesis has made to the field of study.

CHAPTER ONE

In his novel, *The Master,* about the life of novelist Henry James, Colm Toibin creates a telling piece of dialogue (2004). Set in London in the late nineteenth century, the scene is Edmund Gosse, the literary critic, with his friend Henry James. Gosse expresses horror that James has written in fictional form about the domestic life of another contemporary and recently deceased literary critic known to them both, John Addington Symonds. In his novel, Toibin writes,

> 'He [Gosse] insisted that writing a story using factual material and real people was dishonest and strange and somehow underhand. Henry refused to listen to him.' (p.81)

It was prophetic of Toibin to write this exchange between the characters into his novel, because after publication of *The Master,* it was said that his failure to win the Man Booker prize—for which the work had been shortlisted—was because the judges felt the author's imagination was somehow compromised by writing about a real life (and famous) person (Economist, 2015) . The dilemma for the Man Booker judges was echoed by the literary critic John Mullan. His praise for the work is followed by a qualifier, '…it is as good an example of the genre [bio-fiction] as you could wish for' (2005). Alan Hollingsworth was equally suspicious about worthiness when passing judgement on David Lodge's bio-fiction novel about Henry James (2004). '…one comes to feel that as a novel it is limited by its artless closeness to biography' (2004).

Colm Toibin insists he has written nothing other than literary fiction, and any suggestion that his work should be pigeon-holed as a genre somehow different from or lesser than this, he rejects (cited in Lackey, 2018). His steadfast position against the critics goes to the heart of the matter in the debates around biographical fiction and its value, and serves to illustrate the problem of understanding and reaching a consensus about authenticity in a work that demands trust, reliability, and originality.

Historiography, Biography and Fiction: Key Debates

Commentators on the biographical novel mostly agree two things: first, that a growing reader interest in fictional representations of the lives of real people reflects an appetite for fiction that has a guaranteed factual basis (Ives, 2016; Lodge, 2014), and second, that the cultural and literary phenomenon we call postmodernism has allowed novelists the freedom to imagine the lives of these historical personages with impunity (Lackey, 2016) (2017). It was

not until the post-modern turn, for example, that biographic novelists felt they could attribute (Economist, 2015) real names to their protagonists. Somerset Maugham would never have considered naming Paul Gauguin in his fictional portrayal of the artist in his 1919 novel, *The Moon and Sixpence.* His character was Charles Strickland. This practice of falsifying names held sway for most of the Twentieth Century.

"Let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction; the imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously," protests Virginia Woolf at a time of experimentation in literary forms (cited in Latham, 2012 p.355). Prominent among the intellectuals of the London Bloomsbury group that included the novelist/essayist and her husband Leonard, was the biographer Lytton Strachey who experimented with biography. His 'Queen Victoria', according to Nathan Murray (2019, p. 36), 'had nothing to do with Strachey's fidelity to Victoria, the historical personage, and everything to do with Strachey's success in creating a vivid character.' Ironically, Virginia Woolf became a pioneer of biographical fiction with her 1933 novel, *Flush*. The novel's satirical bent aside, it chronicles the courtship of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning.

The theoretical deconstruction of conventional modes of history and biography in the postmodern zeitgeist, then, has made biographical fiction not only possible but popular.

The relation between historical evidence and authorial experience, narrative form, intertextuality, strategies of representation, and the role of language have become issues of debate in literary theory. North American scholars Hayden White and Linda Hutcheon have been at the forefront of postmodern literary thought—in White's case, applying it to historiography (1973) and Hutcheon, to literature (1988). In her *Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon employs the term 'historiographic metafiction' to characterise that which she describes as a paradox, namely, aesthetic autonomy and self-reflexivity colliding with the historical, political and social worlds. In other words, postmodernism problematises 'the once taken for granted historiography—and literature' (1988, p.xii).

Hayden White's discussion of 'meta-history' is an exploration of the text as a site of multiple interpretations or 'truths'. The historical text, he argues, needs to be understood as a literary artefact. Historical events are value neutral, in and of themselves they do not constitute a story but are 'made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others.'(2002, p.84). These stories follow a plot structure that orders and culturally encodes events to make them comprehensible to their audience. White claims that historical narratives are in essence, therefore, verbal fictions, the contents of which are 'as

much invented as found.' (2002, p.82). In this vein, the American novelist, Ronald Sukenick (1985) argues that histories and auto/biographies are no less linguistic constructs than fiction, and equally intertextual, '…no matter how hard you try to get down the data as they literally are, there are almost no literal data. They are always filtered through the creative mind' (p.107). Both are signifying systems in our culture. Both are modes of mediating the world for the purpose of introducing meaning. The English novelist, Hilary Mantel, would agree. She says that in death, we enter fiction. There are 'historical facts' but the evidence is incomplete and the narrative form we give to the past may differ, but it is always interpreted (cited in Durrant, 2017). Australian Hannah Kent says of historical fiction: 'You are not trying to replace—you are trying to interrogate the idea of a single truth', and she goes further: 'You are trying to interrogate even the idea of authenticity.' (2018 p.419). Kent seems to be suggesting here that the concept of authenticity is fluid and ambiguous. This runs counter to what I have claimed in my research question, which is that by differentiating between kinds of authenticity (as I have done in the Introductory chapter), then we can attempt to measure a work as more or less authentic. There is no doubt that measuring 'artistic authenticity' (as opposed to the authenticity of the record) is more difficult. In the case of fiction, it implies the artist has used her creative imagination by drawing on novelistic devices to tell the story. How effective these devices are in achieving a 'sense of authenticity' in a biographical novel, is addressed in Chapter Four.

Yet in writing about real historical personages, questions around what is fact, what is fiction, and what is character, persist in contemporary debates. The historian and biographer John Guy expressed alarm at the increasing numbers of students citing *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* as supporting evidence of their knowledge of Tudor history (Durrant, 2017).

The fact/fiction dichotomy, represented by historians on the one side and novelists on the other, and the struggle to clarify the nature of their work and its role in portraying the past and personages within that past, was played out in Australia following the publications of Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000). Grenville concealed her character's real name, Carey did not, but this detail was of little relevance to those engaged in the 'other history wars'[iii]. Rather, it was the fictional portrayal of white settlement in all its brutality by Grenville, and Carey's provocative title of his novel that historians found confronting. It was not a debate over definitions of genre but

[iii] The term distinguishes the literary debate from a concurrent culture debate among historiographers, and known as 'the history wars'.

rather over research method and the novelist's right to appropriate historical context and real-life people. Grenville insisted that her novel about first settlement on the Hawksbury River and her ancestor's place in it, avoided compromising the 'truth of fact', being faithful to these facts—and echoing Styron's 'responsible imagination'—being a responsible historical novelist (2006).

Further, and importantly for my exegesis, Grenville argued that her novel offered the 'truth of fiction' in its 'different way' of approaching the past. Like most novelists, she sees her work offering a 'poetic' truth. The concept drawers on Aristotle's *Poetics* wherein he declared poetic truth to be superior to historical truth. He called poetry the most philosophic of all writings. The poet's truth sees into the heart of things and enables others to see the same; it offers a kind of universal truth to its reader (http://neoenglishsystem.blogspot.com/2010/08/nature-of). James Joyce said, 'For myself, I always write about Dublin because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities in the world. In the particular is contained the universal.' (cited in O'Toole, *Irish Times,* 2014, December 24). To recognise the truth of fiction is to ask questions relevant to us about the past, informed by our experience of the present. It is to have an ongoing dialogue between past and present. As Salman Rushdie says, 'We can make people agree, in this time of radical disagreement, on the truths of the great constant, which is human nature.' *The New Yorker* (2018).

The debate in Australia followed a similar debate in North America some decades earlier, on the uses of history in fiction. In his survey of that debate and its fall-out, Michael Lackey (2016) notes that, contra Woolf, 'postmodernist writers generally agree that fact and fiction are inseparable, because fictional techniques play a crucial role in shaping fact,' and that the past is always mediated through a specific consciousness, whether it be that of the historian or the novelist. Michael Cunningham, author of *The Hours,* the meta-fictional creative retelling of the death by suicide of Virginia Woolf, reverses the equation, claiming 'there's no such thing as fiction, not in the absolute sense. Fiction writers work from our experience of the world and the people who inhabit it.' (cited in Lackey, 2016, p.49). Whichever way we might choose to view the question 'is it fact or is it fiction', it seems a blurring of what we can take to be 'true' has occurred in the current literary milieu.

In a spirited defence of historical fiction in Britain, Hilary Mantel says: 'Facts are not truth though they are a part of it. History is not the past, it's our method of organising our ignorance of the past.'(Mantel, 2020, Reith Lecture). She observes that it is possible for competent historians to come to radically different conclusions on the basis of the same

evidence. 'Ninety-nine percent of evidence is always partial because unrecorded speech is not available to us.' In this quote, Mantel seems to be making a distinction between 'fact' and 'evidence', and it is worth noting because the terms tend to be used interchangeably. For example, we can't deny that the Great War of 1914-1918 occurred, but evidence as to its causes are of many different kinds, and are always interpreted.

Charting the Rise of the Biographical Novel

Many contemporary novelists across the globe have taken as their subject artistic lives from history. In the space of just a few years, for example, there have been four novels written about the writer Henry James (Lodge, 2014), and five novels about Virginia Woolf (Latham, 2012). Other bio-fiction novels specifically about writers, include Emma Tennant's *Sylvia and Ted* (2001) about the poet Sylvia Plath, Julian Barnes' *Arthur & Geor*ge (2005) about Arthur Conan Doyle, Damon Galgut's (2014) *Arctic Summer* about E.M. Forster, John Coetzee's (1994) *The Master of Petersburg* about Dostoyevski, Dennis Glover's (2017) *The Last Man in Europe* about George Orwell, Louisa Treger's (2013) *The Lodger,* about Dorothy Richardson, Polly Samson's (2020) *A Theatre for Dreamers,* about Charmian Clift, and the metafictional novels about Woolf (Cunningham), Flaubert (Barnes,1984), and Henrik Ibsen (A.S. Byatt's, 2000).

A leading advocate for the biographical novel as a distinct genre is the American scholar, Michael Lackey. He has produced three important collections of discussion and debate in an effort to delineate what we might usefully call 'biographical fiction'. Lackey argues that a critical difference between biographical and historical fiction is that the biographical novelist prioritizes 'agency' where historical fiction downplays it (2016, *Intro*). The biographical novelist, he argues, gives his or her character 'an active and resisting' consciousness in shaping and being shaped by the world around them. It's a moot argument and some novelists are likely to disagree with Lackey's proposition. Hilary Mantel, for example, identifies her *Wolf Hall* trilogy as historical fiction, yet her protagonist, Thomas Cromwell, reveals very determinedly a man with an 'active and resisting consciousness', who both shapes and is shaped by the world around him.[iv] Elsewhere, Lackey (2018) labours the point about 'agency' as somehow unique to the biographical novel, but as E.M. Forster reminds us, agency is central to all fiction (1927).

[iv] It is worthy of note that since the publication of *Wolf Hall,* three biographies of Thomas Cromwell have been published.

Lackey's volumes—some of which arose from round table discussions—build on the seminal work of Middeke and Huber (1999), and are evidence of a strong interest in the form in the United States. The first volume includes interviews with American novelists who have taken as their subject a real person from history. The second volume is a reader that brings together literary scholars who analyse the fictional form, and the third volume pulls together conversations with novelists from around the globe who have written biographical novels. In these interviews, authors describe their motivations for selecting their real-life historical subject, and the creative process in writing their fictional narratives. Australia's Hannah Kent, for example, began by thinking speculative biography as a research led practice might be a better methodology for her story about Agnes Magnusdottir than writing a fictional story inspired by facts (2018), but her thoughts about genre and method changed, due in part to a dearth of information about her subject.

Lackey's claims about the distinctiveness of the biographical novel draws opinions that diverge: novelists are generally less inclined to see their work as identifiably different from literary/historical fiction per se, while scholars, perhaps unsurprisingly, appear sympathetic to the idea of genre distinctions. In Lackey's second volume, for example, Ansgar Nunning (2017, pp. 363-370) provides us with a typology for the genre identifying four modes of writing biographical fiction: Documentary, Realist, Revisionist, and Meta-fictional. While the first two modes are modernist, representing real lives in a normative way, the Revisionist mode 'rewrites that life'. It 'reinterprets the biographical record and revises the formal conventions of traditional biographical fictions.' Self-reflexive writing is a characteristic of the Revisionist mode and carries notions of narrative voice. Susan Sellers, in her novel of the Stephens sisters, *Vanessa and Virginia* (2008), tells their story from the self-reflective voice of Vanessa, using the second person point of view (POV). Peter Carey developed his revisionist approach to representing the flesh and blood character of Ned Kelly in fictional form, using the Jerilderie letter (dictated in real life by an illiterate Ned to his friend) to imagine the voice of his protagonist using first person POV. Kate Grenville's latest offering (2020) is a revisionist telling of the life of Elizabeth Macarthur, using the literary device of memoir. By giving voice through this device to a woman silenced by history, the novel is illustrative of the political purpose of revisionism. A revisionist mode, however, does not break the aesthetic illusion in the way that meta-fictional novels do. Many contemporary works sit within a postmodern epistemology, and it is the metafictional modes in particular that have won high critical esteem. The Pulitzer prize winning novel by Michael Cunningham, *The Hours,* A.S. Byatt's, *The Biographer's Tale*—a complex novel that

foregrounds problems of method and epistemology involved in writing—and Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot,* are examples of metafictions.

Biography, Fiction, or a Hybrid?

In Australia, biographical fiction is most often spoken of, if it is spoken at all, as a 'hybrid' form (Nelson, 2018) and bio-fiction writers as 'boundary riders' (Lindsey, 2018). Scholarly debate on the form remains embryonic, most commentary coming from a Life Writing perspective rather than a novelistic one. Brien and Eades (2018) explore experimental methods in biography, and include in their collected essays discussion on speculative biography where 'speculation' or imagination can be used to fill gaps in the record. In their introduction, the authors acknowledge a noticeable shift over just a few years to 'the role of fiction in life writing'. They also observe 'the fretful and anxiety-ridden manner in which discussion on this topic [fictionalized biographies] is often framed.' (p.4). The West Australian novelist Amanda Curtin's speculative biography of the artist, Kathleen O'Connor, and its publication success, may have gone some way to settling their disquiet (2018). In her 'creative' non-fiction telling of O'Connor's life, Curtin's post-modernist approach allows her to insert herself into the story, reflecting upon her own processes of artful composition. She says of her subject, Kathleen O'Connor: 'I want to approach her, approach understanding, without the need for resolution, resisting the impulse to fashion her into a character of my own devising whose desires I know, whose motivations are clear.' (2018, p.17).

Her caution is reinforced by Ina Schabert (1990) who says of biography, '…the parts are items of information which cannot confirm each other by virtue of an intrinsic aesthetic pattern'. Echoing Hayden White, Schabert says any attempt to impose a coherence to the whole would amount to something 'the writer [biographer] has imposed upon the facts.' The difference between the genres of fiction and biography, she argues, lies in their narrative structures, aesthetics, and organising principles. In bio-fiction, 'the outer world of biographical fact is seen in reference not to history but to an inner world which is the creation of the novelist.' (2017, p.290). Thus, it 'creates "lives" from the facts by working within the formal traditions of the novel'.

The biographical novel, therefore, should not be confused with speculative biography. While gaps in the evidence may be a motivating force for writing a bio-fiction, filling the gaps is only one part, and probably a small part of the work of a novelist. Hilary Mantel puts it thus: 'The historian and the biographer follow a paper trail. The novelist does that too, then

performs another act, he puts the past back into process, into action. He frees the people from the archives and lets them run about, ignorant of their fate, where all their mistakes are made.' (Reith lectures, 2020).

In Australia, James Vicars has made a clarion call for debate around the bio-fiction novel. He decries the pressure on bio-fiction writers, to 'acquiesce to the reductive either *fiction* or *biography*' disclaimer (2016). He notes the high numbers of what might be termed bio-fictions published in this country and in New Zealand and cites examples that demonstrate confusion over classification, noting 'that even those [novelists] who are highly acclaimed, feel constrained to be apologetic about the biographical value of their works' (n.p.). Of particular relevance to my argument is Vicars' more incisive observation that the expectation on bio-fiction writers to certify their work as 'unreliable' misses the point of it, which is fiction's potential for truth telling. In her essay on the numerous bio-fictions about Virginia Woolf, Latham (2012) makes a similar claim that these works offer 'infinite possibilities [that] prolong the true facts, or fill in the nebulous blanks left by biographies' (p.356). Mantel is more strident. She says: 'I became a novelist to tell the truth. … I do not cede to historians the ground occupied by silence. It's not a silence. It's a humanity. We are working with fallible, flaky human beings.' (Reith lectures, 2020).

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter posed the problem for biographical novelists, that is, how their work might be received by critic and reader. Can an imaginative work about a real historical personage be trusted as an authentic interpretation of a life and at the same time be valued for its originality? This chapter began with a discussion of contemporary debates, originating in historiography and post-modern literary theory, that have challenged the normative assumptions that underlie the question of trust. By turning the tables on the disciplines of history and biography, literary theorists have questioned the impartiality of practitioners of these disciplines and their uses of evidence. Notions of linguistic objectivity have been challenged, with a consequent blurring of narrative forms we use to retrieve the past.

A concern that remains, however, for the biographical novelist is how their work will be read: as literary fiction or something else? This chapter explored some key North American debates around the question of what constitutes a biographical novel. Efforts have been made by scholars to specify its features in order to understand the genre—to identify the different ways in which writing fiction about real lives from the past can be approached, from 'documentary' style to 'metafictions'. With some exceptions, novelists mostly agree their

work should not be pigeon-holed or seen as something less than literary fiction. Novelists who have written about real lives in the Australian landscape have been challenged by historians and biographers, and as suggested by one scholar, the expectation on bio-fiction writers to certify their work as unreliable misses the point of fiction's potential for truth telling. Many bio/historical novelists across the globe have argued for fiction's capacity for offering truth of a different kind: its capacity to see into the heart of things, to tell us what the past felt like from the inside, and to offer the reader a kind of universal truth that connects a personal story with the collective past and present.

In the next chapter, I return to the subject of my novel; Olive Schreiner the woman and her art, and I provide a sketch of the historical context in which she worked. This is followed by an examination of the biographical record. Understanding her work and her milieu are necessary prerequisites in establishing the authenticity of my fictional interpretation of seven years of Schreiner's life. Interrogating the biographical record will support the arguments made in this chapter around notions of questionable evidence and truthful fictions.

CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter, Olive Schreiner's oeuvre and her social and political thought are explored, in particular, how she gave artistic expression to her thought through creative writing. The impact of Schreiner's work on, among others, early Australian women authors is considered. The chapter then proceeds to examine what has been said about her and her art by biographers and Schreiner scholars. I contend that commentary on her life and work is a contested space that opens out possibilities for new interpretations, and new approaches, in this case, through the medium of the bio-fiction novel.

Olive Schreiner was the pre-eminent South African novelist of her day, catapulted to fame with the publication of her novel *The Story of an African Farm* ([1883] 1992). It was written as a young adult in circumstances not dissimilar to those of Australian novelist Miles Franklin when she wrote *My Brilliant Career* (1901); while working as a governess on farms because her own family was too poor to support her. Schreiner's novel, about sexuality and death, challenged conventional understandings of gender roles, religion and colonialism; the anti-social impulses of her characters, Lyndall and Waldo, leading eventually to their demise. *African Farm* was, as Burdett (2001) has argued, a precursor to the modernist novel of the Twentieth Century. Miles Franklin herself was much taken with the novel, as was the Melbourne born writer, Henry Handel Richardson. In the latter's debut novel, *Maurice Guest,* she incorporates Schreiner's novel into a scene of dialogue between her characters, Mrs Cayhill and Dove. Mrs Cayhill tries to remember the name of the book she has been lent.

> 'Oh yes, I know, it was about a farm, an Australian farm.' Dove corrects her, *The Story of an African Farm.* 'Australian or African, it doesn't matter which.' 'Yes, a nice book, but a little coarse in parts, and very foolish at the end—the disguising, and the dying out of doors, and the looking-glass, and all that.'
>
> 'I must say I think it a very powerful book,' said Dove solemnly. 'That part, you know, where the boy listens to the clock ticking in the night, and thinks to himself that with every tick, a soul goes home to God. A very striking idea!' ([1908] 1981).

Schreiner's Oeuvre in Context

The publication of Schreiner's novel coincided with a late 19th century blossoming of ideas centred around social progress and scientific explorations. In the city's debating societies, Olive was able to articulate theoretically what had been primitive thoughts when she penned *The Story of An African Farm*—the Woman Question, for example, was a hot topic in the

1880s. Women's freedom and fulfilment, and reformed heterosexual relations, were just two of many issues up for debate. Others included a growing interest in communitarianism, ethical socialism, and in workers' rights and political representation—then a preserve of the male propertied class.

Schreiner's first attempt at novel writing, *Undine,* begun when she was a youth staying on the diamond fields with her older siblings, was published posthumously in 1929. Another novel, *From Man to Man,* begun around the same time with many incarnations, and also published posthumously, in 1926, Schreiner had always held would be her 'next great novel'. Though it remained in manuscript form during her lifetime, *From Man to Man* was a triumph of modern women's literature. In the editor's introduction to the 2015 edition of the novel, she says, 'Schreiner had considerable ambitions for *From Man to Man*: she hoped the novel would offer 'strength and comfort' to women, making some of them 'more tender to others', and men 'more tender to women because they will understand them better.' (Driver, 2015)(xii) These ambitions Schreiner achieved in her life time, not through her novel, but in writing a landmark philosophical treatise, *Woman and Labour*, published in London in 1911. This work that she oft referred to as her 'sex book', and beavered away at for at least twenty years, was inspirational to suffragists and others in redefining women's domestic and social roles. Dubbed the 'Bible of the Women's Movement', its message of emancipation was as much directed at men as women ([1911] 1982). Miles Franklin sent her mother a copy, underlining 'must read' passages (Roe, 2008).

Schreiner's feminist sentiments were constants in her thought and art, even when her writing went in a different and more urgent direction following her return to South Africa. Her response to the plight of nineteenth century women denied political and economic independence, was to write allegories. These collected 'poems in prose' as a critic of the time called them, were published as *Dreams,* and *Dream Life and Real Life* in London in 1891 and 1893, the former going into eight editions by the end of the decade, and later, giving hope and being shared among the early suffragists incarcerated in Holloway Prison[v] (1891). After returning to the Cape Colony, Schreiner launched herself into writing non-fiction essays about the country of her birth and its peoples, published as essays in the *Fortnightly Review* and reproduced in book form as *Thoughts on South Africa* by Fisher Unwin ([1923] 1992).

In South Africa, the consolidation of diamond mining interests and the discovery of gold had turned a sleepy, mostly agrarian country that Olive had left in her youth into a

[v] In 1923 another collection, *Stories, Dreams and Allegories*, was published posthumously.

bubbling cauldron of political intrigue, guns, monopolists, and provocations for war, first against the 'native' tribes in the region that became Rhodesia, and then against the Afrikaner (Boer) South African Republic—the 'Transvaal'—to the north where the Rand gold mines were located. As Burdett explains, what Schreiner witnessed over the next decade, 'made her increasingly critical of western modernity and its claim to be a story of progress.' (2001, p.59). Though Schreiner was resolutely loyal to British ideals of justice, truth and law, by observing first hand imperialist exploitation of the sub-continent, 'she was grievously tested' (Clayton, 1997, p.89). Schreiner turned to political economic theory for explanation and responded by writing polemical essays that expressed her deep concern for South Africa's future, and for its many different peoples. These several treatises were not simply an expression of sadness or outrage, but attempted to chart a way forward for her countrymen and women to achieve a united country and a just society.

Schreiner saw that social class divisions in South Africa had a racial complexion, and her sympathy for exploited blacks was matched only by her sympathy for Boer independence in the two Afrikaner republics that had been established by the early voor-trekkers. In 1897, at the height of the land grab by the Royal Chartered British South Africa Company, and the brutal suppression of native resistance, Schreiner published an allegorical novella, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* ([1897] 1992). Her strategy in writing the novella was to disrupt or even overturn assumptions about the colonial project. It was the work of which she remained most proud, claiming that on her grave she wanted only the words: 'She wrote Trooper Peter Halket'. According to Driver, all of Schreiner's writing was driven by 'a vision of an ideal society.' (p. xxviii). She was in this respect, a product of her time.

The more unsettling ideas about human progress that emerged in the late nineteenth century, were those associated with Darwin's theory of evolution and its theme of survival of the fittest species of the animal kingdom. For some scientists, like her English friends Karl Pearson and Havelock Ellis, these ideas morphed into the new science of eugenics, or 'social Darwinism'. For others—Empire builders like Cecil Rhodes—it provided justification for their actions against those seen as 'primitive' peoples in foreign lands. Ideas of human progress so central to Olive Schreiner's writing places her oeuvre in that body of literature we now call 'colonial writing' that in contemporary society is too often dismissed for its ideological effects. It is true that her early position on the colonised of South Africa, blacks and coloureds, fitted with the liberal-conservative tradition of white superiority, and in the Cape Colony more specifically, British superiority. However, as Chapman (1996) argues, 'We need to go beyond critiques of negation to the few writers in the nineteenth century who

asked questions that cannot easily be dismissed' (p.133). Schreiner rejected the evolutionary hierarchies of Social Darwinism between 'primitive' and civilised peoples, and while her fascination with the South African Kalahari 'Bushman' suggests an anthropological interest, she did not see these people in the way they were seen by evolutionary theorists of the time, as fossilised reflections of 'the way we were'. Rather, she saw them 'infused with regenerative qualities' (Driver, p.xxiv).

Racial terminology is used by Schreiner no less, to describe the African Xhosa as 'Kaffir'. The term was in common usage during the colonial era, with no consciously ill intent in and of itself, but rather gathered around ugly associations, especially in the Twentieth Century, so that it came to be experienced as offensive and oppressive by those who suffered the experience of colonisation and apartheid. As Driver demonstrates well in her editorial introduction to *From Man to Man,* there was a marked shift in Olive Schreiner's social and racial awareness from when she left South African shores to her return to the country. More significant, was the way in which Schreiner theorised race relations in her writing and in her activism, believing that the 'race problem' would not be solved until and if each race felt equally empowered. They were the same ideas she applied to debates around women's emancipation.

White superiority in the Cape Colony had a predominantly English face that rubbed up against the first white settlers—the Dutch Afrikaner—and while some of the latter group sat in the Cape Parliament as elected members representing constituents with economic power, for Schreiner, it was the poor Afrikaner farmer, the Boer, who had trekked east and north to escape British dominance that she had the most sympathy with. Olive Schreiner does, however, sit awkwardly in post-colonial scholarship as both colonised—a woman and marginalised—and coloniser (Aslami, 2012)[vi] .

The Scholarship

Schreiner's first biographer was her husband, Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner[vii], who published *The Life of Olive Schreiner* (1924a), and the most recent to date is Carol Burdett's biography (2013). Cherry Clayton has classified the Schreiner biographies chronologically, and describes them as jumping 'from the naïve "life of a genius" discursive to a self-sacrificing "angel-in-the-house" approach, to a knowing assessment of a Victorian neurotic' (1984, p. 50). These interpretations, she says, reveal different emphases and prejudices

[vi] See also Stanley (2020) for an excellent discussion of the challenges faced by post-colonial scholarship.
[vii] Samuel Cronwright took his wife's name on their marriage.

(depending on time and place), and ideologies ranging from British jingoism to Afrikaner nationalism to Marxism. To this could be said of the latest offering, an interpretation shaped by a feminist lens.

In these biographies, assumptions are made about the artist and her relationships. More worrying is what I suggest are assumptions made on a misreading of the Cronwright biography, and that have become truisms echoed down the ages and pages of scholarship. An example is found in the work of her fourth biographer, Johannes Meintjes (1965) who claims, 'he [Cronwright] sacrificed his livelihood at her [Olive's] special request in order that she might finish her two novels' (p.132). The theme of sacrifice is repeated in subsequent biographies so that when it reaches commentary coming from the feminist canon, the theme of a disgruntled husband is amplified and enlarged upon. '…he [Cronwright] presents an account in which he is the hero and Schreiner the neurotic and tiresome disappointment to whom he was selflessly devoted' (Treagus, 2014, p.34). Clayton herself, falls into the trap.

> 'It is probable that her marriage had for all intents and purposes ended…Their union had suffered almost from the first by her need to follow where her health and asthma attacks dictated and from her husband's increasingly resentful expectation that she should finish her large books and earn their income since his income from farming had been removed.' (1997, p.105).[viii]

In fact, in his biography, Cronwright reproduces the letter that Olive wrote pleading with him to stay on the farm, while she would move to a healthier environment, close enough for them to commute (the farm's location caused her to suffer almost daily bouts of asthma). Only later, when he insisted on following her to Kimberley, did she propose they could live on the earnings of her writing. There is an undeniable bitterness conveyed in Cronwright's biography at having given up 'his livelihood' on this expectation. However, *The Life of Olive Schreiner* was written after his wife's death, by a man already in his sixties who was lonely and grieving (see Walters and Fogg (2015) for annotated extracts from Samuel Cronwright's diaries written contemporaneously).

It is not my intention here to argue over whether Cronwright did or didn't resent his wife for not delivering on a proposition, but rather to argue that this scholarly focus on a single aspect of the Cronwright-Schreiner marriage to the exclusion of all else about the marriage, has denied Olive her agency. She chose Cronwright as her life partner and stayed

[viii] Clayton references an article she wrote about the Cronwright Schreiner's period living in Johannesburg. The article itself is highly speculative, based on one letter written to Betty Molteno where Schreiner speaks of her loneliness. She hated Johannesburg as her writing at the time tells us.

loyal to him until her death. Olive was a woman unusual for her time in so far as she had choices, she had money (that she had earned herself through her book sales), she had friends and family, and contacts in the publishing and political worlds. She didn't have to marry Cronwright, but she chose to. Reading their correspondence in the years of their separation during the Great War, the letters suggest a special kind of relationship based on respect and affection, an observation made also by Berkman: 'Whatever their marital discord, they remained devoted to each other. While separated, there was an uninterrupted flow of affectionate correspondence between them.' (1989, p.34). A letter Olive sent to Cronwright in 1914 from London, where she addresses her husband, 'My Pal', causes Ridley Beeton to ask 'was there so distinct an estrangement between them as we have been made to think by several biographers?' (1987, p.247).

I contend, therefore, that a more sensitive and nuanced narrative that 'transposes biographical elements and shapes a poetic trajectory' of at least part of Schreiner's life, drawing on her literary works and epistolary, enhances our knowledge of the subject (Latham, 2012, p.356). I return to a discussion of Cronwright's biography in Chapter Four, and its utility for my own creative production.

Other scholarship on Schreiner's life and her art are numerous and varied, ranging from a speculative biographical tale that the teenage Olive had an abortion (Bradford, 1995), to Susan Horton's psycho-analysis which adopts the Foucauldian concept of a 'split subject' to explain what she sees as Schreiner's conflicted personality (1995). On her art, her critics—South African and international—adopt varying perspectives on different aspects of her work. Her second novel, *From Man to Man,* has attracted much attention both at the time of its publication and more recently. Edwardian critics, who in the 1920s were mostly men, were not kind in their assessment of the work, variously criticising its linear narrative and its interpolative polemics (Parkin-Gounelas, 1991). Since that time, many scholars have lauded the novel for the 'power and vibrancy' of the writing, '…its wedding of political and literary objectives', 'a heroic attempt at the reconstitution of community in South Africa', and name it as 'one of the great feminist novels of the Twentieth Century' (Driver, 2015, p.xiii). Because the novel remained unpublished at the time of her death and the manuscript's conclusion was left to her husband to piece together, there is contention about its ending, and also many theories as to why Schreiner herself had not seen the manuscript through to publication, including more finger pointing to her husband's role in this. Cronwright makes an entry in the diary he kept while working on the biography, about the opening chapter or 'Prelude' to the novel that Olive had composed while still in Matjesfontein: 'Olive's Prelude

is a wonderful, a magical thing; and the book would, I think, have been one of the great novels if she had finished it.' (cited in Walters and Fogg, 2015).

Summary and Conclusion

Histories and biographies have their place; they inform us, and without them the bio/historical novelist would be stranded. Looking back on the record of Schreiner's life from the twenty-first century, it is easy to see the challenging and conflicted space in which she lived. As an intelligent late nineteenth century woman, she would have found the new ideas of science that promised a better future for humanity at once appealing and contradictory to the lived experience of women and subjugated peoples everywhere, recognising too, that its claims were themselves hotly contested and differently interpreted.

The biographical scholarship, however, shows us something else: it reveals the conjectural nature of these narratives. The life of Olive Schreiner, I conclude from the foregoing discussion, is a contested space, a site of multiple 'truths' into which a biographical novel may represent another form of truth that convinces by its own integrity and power. In writing a bio-fiction about Olive Schreiner, my intention was to make her agency front and centre, and to produce a novel made valid by her historical and cultural contexts. Damon Galgut says evidence or fact provides 'the bones' of his story. The 'tissue', he says, is the novelist's imagination (2015). For Middeke and Huber (1999), early contributors to the debate, evidence is the 'historical foil' upon which stories about romantic lives from history are built. For Colm Toibin, evidence is 'the anchor' for his fiction.

Unlike Kent's protagonist in her bio-fiction novel, I began with a glut of information about Olive Schreiner, despite which it was never my intention to write a biography, speculative or otherwise. Rather, I wanted to enhance extant knowledge about her via a medium that allowed for an exploration of the interior drama of her life. Biographers and historians have reported her outer world, but I wanted to know her thoughts. I can't know what she thought or felt with any certainty but, to fictionalise her story using the literary devices of the novel form, working within the framework of the biographical and historical record, I argue I am able to offer the reader something more.

In the next chapter, I compare two of the several novels written about the late nineteenth century writer, Henry James. How each novelist approaches their subject and negotiates the glut of biographical material available to them with their desire to offer something new and original will illustrate the challenge for fiction writers, identified in

Chapters One and Two, namely, that of authenticity in an imaginative work about a real-life personage.

CHAPTER THREE

As part of my exploration towards answering the research questions in this exegesis, I have chosen to compare two novels about the celebrated nineteenth century author, Henry James. Published in the same year, Colm Toibin's *The Master* (2004) and David Lodge's *Author, Author* (2004) are not the only novels that have been written about James, but I chose these for comparison because neither novelist knew in the process of creating, what shape the other's work would take. As I noted in Chapter One, many bio-fictions have appeared about famous novelists, including those written by women about women novelists. I could have, for example, compared Sellers' novel (2008) about the Stephens sisters with that of Priya Parmar's novel (2014). However, I chose the James books because their subject matter was close to my own in temporal and artistic terms. I had read *The Master* early in my research phase and wanted to adopt it as a model for my creative work. In particular, I was attracted to the point of view used by Toibin in creating his character of the real-life personage. Subsequently, I read critical reviews comparing Toibin's novel with David Lodge's novel, and felt that a comparison might illuminate the difficulties of writing biographical fiction where both known fact and imagination must be knitted together.

In comparing these novels then, I seek firstly, to shed light on the practice of writing a biographical novel, and how the form might enhance what is known about the historical personage. Secondly, I want to assess the implications of divergent authorial approaches to the same subject person. Thirdly, following on from Chapters One and Two, I want to examine how the past has been informed by each author's experience in the present. I explore the idea of truth, how the biographical novel has been understood by critics as 'reliable' and 'trustworthy' or not, and how searching for what is factually true may in fact obscure an ability to see what fiction offers—truth of a different kind. Authorial choice, and artistic expression are important measures of originality; the author creates the character according to his or her vision of the historical figure. Both authors have given multiple interviews about their James work, revealing the approach they each take to their subject. In the process of this comparison, then, I want to know how the authors execute their visions of the nineteenth century writer; how they use dialogue and inner monologue, for example, and how they use reflection and introspection to build a believable character. Finally, I ask what have I learnt about the novelist, Henry James? And, how have these different renditions made me feel about the protagonist's inner self?

The Master covers a period of just five years of Henry James' life beginning in 1895, set in London and then in Rye where James later moved to a country house. *Author, Author* begins a little earlier and covers something like a decade from the 1880s to the late 1890s. The latter novel then jumps forward in time to include James' death in 1916 as its final chapter, having opened the story one year earlier with James' terminal illness. Thus, 1915 and 1916 are book ends to the decade of the story. The historical setting—end of the 19th century—sets the tone of both novels. An end of a century always brings promise of the new, this is where Toibin's novel ends, whereas Lodge's novel moves the reader into the new century, and ends midway through the tragedy of the Great War. We thus learn something more about James, for example, that he took British citizenship to show his support for the war against Germany and that his nearest and dearest brother, William, predeceased him. Lodge's novel is much longer (150 pages more) than Toibin's novel.

We are told in both novels that James is middle-aged. Lodge uses third person free indirect style to report what happened to his protagonist in the middle years of his life living in London, but he also uses inner monologue to imitate the consciousness of James. He deviates in parts of the novel, using the device of bracketing the voice and consciousness of different attendant figures. At the opening night of James' play *Guy Domville,* for example, and in the death scene at the novel's conclusion, it is the voices of friends, or servants and family that we hear. Toibin adopts the mode of third person limited, or intimate, narrating his whole story through the eyes and thoughts of his protagonist, that is, through 'one consciousness' only. Past tense is adopted in both renditions, though Lodge slips into present tense at the end of the work in the death scene chapter. Past perfect is used extensively by Toibin, whose character reflects on his earlier life. Lodge gives us descriptions of James: 'he was volatile, loquacious, nervous', and in appearance, he was balding, had a middle age spread, looked older than he actually was. Toibin relies on James' analytical introspection, and what he says in the company of others —which is not very much—to form character. The effect is to make his protagonist appear a somewhat introverted personality, which in real life, it has been said by James' biographers, he was not (Toibin, 2018). The 'one consciousness' point of view means that we have limited knowledge of what the protagonist looks like. Toibin writes:

> 'He had learned that when he quietly fixed his calm grey eyes on somebody they too became calm.' (p.5).

So, he had grey eyes but that is about all we learn of James' external appearance in *The Master*. However, this sentence in itself conveys James' interiority.

From the acknowledgements at the end of both novels, we learn that the authors relied on Leon Edel's five volume biography of Henry James, and also Edel's volume of James' collected letters. Given that some of the years covered in each rendition overlap, it is not surprising that scenes of real events and real relationships are repeated in each novel, the energetic and captivating scene of James trying to dispose of his recently deceased friend Fenimore Woolson's clothes in the Venice lagoon, is an example. In my reading, both renderings of this scene appeared uncannily alike, only later did I learn that the scene had been written into Emma Tennant's *Felony*, a book about Woolson, and that Tennant, in turn, had taken the scene from Lyndall Gordon's book, *A Private Life of Henry James.* (Lodge, 2014). Both authors acknowledge their use of Gordon's book. The staging of James' ambitious play, *Guy Domville,* is another duplicated scene, and though it is positioned in different parts of each novel it is, in a sense, the crux of both narratives: the climactic point in Lodge's, the opening chapter in Toibin's novel.

Characters that appear in both renditions are another of James' friends, the critic and essayist, Edmund Gosse, and various American associates and family members. It is, however, surprising that some of James' relationships during these overlapping years are ignored in one rendition while being central in the other. His close friendship with the sketch artist and novelist, George Du Maurier and his family, are explored by Lodge in lengthy detail for much of the novel, at times, to the point of crowding out the central character. However, Du Maurier does not rate a single mention in Toibin's book, though according to Lodge (2014) the sketch artist attended the opening night of *Guy Domville*. In Toibin's story, Lady Wolseley is a significant character but there is no mention of her in Lodge's novel. Neither does Lodge have James travelling to Ireland where Toibin's protagonist stays with the Wolseleys after the disastrous failure of his play. Lodge's protagonist goes to Torquay to recover from the disappointment.

These differences are significant because they reveal authorial choice, the selection of some aspects of James' life while others are left out entirely. For the Irish Toibin, devoting pages to his country under British occupation (Lord Wolseley was commander in chief of Her Majesty's forces in Ireland) is important, and James' relationship to the Wolseleys allows the author to draw out the historical fact of occupation (Toibin, 2018).

Each author places a different emphasis on their character's sexuality. Lodge's character is prudish and while James, we are told, likes the company of young men, he is disgusted at Oscar Wilde's alleged homosexual behaviour. Toibin, on the other hand, takes several opportunities in his rendition to portray a character who may be sexually repressed

yet who imagines possibilities that he will not allow to go further than 'the secrets of the mind.' Toibin sensitively reimagines a scene (which Lodge [2014] suggests was taken from Novick's biography) of a homosexual experience in James' early adult life.

Dialogue is an essential technique in a novelist's arsenal. However, Toibin relies more heavily on the inner monologues of his protagonist, and dialogue of any length is presented most often in scenes of family life, told in retrospect. This contrasts with Lodge's greater use of dialogue in the present which helps illuminate character and move the story along. Toibin makes extensive use of the literary device of *analapsis*—scenes and stories from the past. His protagonist's memory of these is typically prompted by some event or action in the present—the arrival of a visitor, a reading of his notes, or re-reading of old letters. In the early chapters we learn about his sister Alice who died 'three years ago', what her life had been like growing up in a straight-laced Boston family, and Henry's relationship with her. Similarly, we learn of his cousin, Minny Temple, who had made a great impression on the young Henry in Boston, as well as on their American friends. He is reminded of Minny, and the sadness surrounding her early death when an old Bostonian friend still bearing a grudge, visits him in England. These characterisations of Alice and Minny are interspersed with introspections by James about his own character, his life in England, and also about his writing.

A necessary aspect of both bio-fictions is that they include descriptions and scenes of James' writing work, and importantly, what he thinks about it. Toibin deftly weaves James' imaginative processes with thoughts his protagonist has about family members, and about his friends and acquaintances who make their way into his writing. Lodge's emphasis here is somewhat different; his focus is more on James' writing of plays and their various successes or otherwise with fickle stage producers. Though the two novels are told differently, and both Henry James have different personas, in my view, they are both believable characters. Toibin's protagonist is a private and humble man, while Lodge's character is somewhat pompous and competitive (the outstanding success of Du Maurier's *Trilby* is a great irritation to him), yet Lodge's James is also a considerate man where his family and his servants are concerned. Lodge's vision of James is a sociable and talkative man who contrives to be the epitome of an English gentleman: a collection of canes and other accoutrements, and James' convoluted speech are literary devices used by Lodge to create character. Toibin's character says very little, he is rather an observer of behaviour, breeding and good manners.

A significant aspect of the novel is its narrative structure: plot, its pattern and rhythm, and thus its aesthetic appeal, but as Forster intones, it is the secret life of the protagonist that

distinguishes fiction from other narrative forms. Sexual secrecy is a pattern developed in *The Master* that conveys disappointment. Lodge's novel appears to have no such secrets, but if in *Author Author,* there is a pattern, it is a series of disappointments for James because of his failure as a playwright. The traditional dramatic arc of a fictional narrative is possibly less suited to bio-fiction that follows the daily life in action and reflection. Jane Alison (2019) suggests a number of different ways a fictional story can be told, not necessarily following the traditional narrative arc of drama with its rise, climax, fall, and resolution. Citing examples from published works, she identifies these different patterns as: meander, spiral, radial, fractal, cellular or network patterns. 'A meandering narrative might digress, sometimes flowing quickly and sometimes barely at all, often looping back on itself, yet ultimately moving onward' (p.5). While Lodge's narrative follows a chronological 'moving forward', a 'meandering' style of story-telling is evident in his work, though a dramatic plot structure is attempted by positioning the opening night scene of James' play, *Guy Domville,* at the two thirds mark. The disastrous failure of this play is, says Lodge, 'the hub of the whole novel' (2018). The crises for the central character in both renditions are James' failure as a playwright, and failure in his interpersonal relations with women. A spiralling narrative, says Alison, is typical of reflective, lyrical novels as is, I believe, Toibin's novel. The arc seems to follow a spiralling pattern moving with regular, rhythmic repetitions while advancing steadily. Not much happens in the way of dramatic action in his novel, yet he has created a character whose emotions are nonetheless profoundly important to the story. For example, his Henry James is a deeply introspective man who while remaining unmarried and childless, feels a strong, almost haunting, emotional attachment to his own (now mostly dead) family.

In both renditions there is resolution: in Toibin's novel it is subtle—a reckoning, a settlement between James and his brother, William— and ultimately, as a reader I feel it is more satisfying than Lodge's, though the latter has a certain poignancy. In the death scene, the horrific detail of the trenches in Flanders is sensitively retold to the comatose James by his faithful man servant, Burgess Noakes. At this point, Lodge assumes the voice of the omniscient narrator to make a closing salutation to the great author. I conclude that in the telling of a life, Lodge's emphasis on external detail must surely absorb the reader in its historical richness, yet the heaviness of this detail tends to have a smothering effect on both the character (rendering him less memorable), and the narrative's dramatic impact.

Imagination, Experience and Evidence

Michael Lackey's third volume includes interviews with both Colm Toibin and David Lodge about their Henry James novels. Lodge wrote about the later period of Henry James life because most biographies deal with his early life. 'We don't have any real traces of what he felt [in that later period] except from his letters'. He says, 'I relied a lot on letters because letters are real documents and they are the voices of the people that wrote them…they give direct access to James's consciousness in particular situations.' (2018, p. 236). Lodge's vision of Henry James is of a somewhat comic as well as tragic character. Although he declares his book 'a novel' on the cover page, Lodge seems uneasy about inventing whole scenes, and says he will not 'if it can be avoided'. 'I like some kind of hook that's in the documents, that I can legitimately connect to.' (2018, p.240). He seems more comfortable in naming bio-fiction a 'hybrid', and claims 'that's the point of it.' (p.238). In his book of essays, *The Year of Henry James,* Lodge says, 'the writer sets himself or herself different rules about the relationship of fact to fiction'; and he admits sticking very close to the historical record (2014, p.35). By choosing an historical figure like Henry James, he says, 'the problem of getting the reader to believe in the story is partly solved…if you use your sources accurately then the context you're providing reassures the reader'. (2018, p. 239).

Colm Toibin eschews any notion of biographical fiction being anything other than literary fiction. He explains that writing a novel about Henry James gave him amplitude to write about a character who had many more choices and chances than the characters in his previous novel, *The Blackwater Lightship.* He says of biographical fiction, 'it's not a subgenre—it's just another thing I did.' (2018, p. 226). Toibin does, however, draw a distinction between a biographical novel and an historical one. Here he uses the example of James' Kensington apartment being wired for electricity in 1896. A big event, Toibin is sure, but to write about historical detail such as his house interiors or what age was Queen Victoria, would detract from James's mind— 'I must be living with his preoccupations.' (p. 228). The authors' differing approaches to historical detail is illustrated in their respective scenes of James purchasing his house at Rye. In *The Master,* Toibin includes a description of the shape and style of the house, but he does so in less than a page, artfully merging external detail with the character's feelings for the house. This contrasts sharply with Lodge's lengthy descriptions room by room, including the reader being told of previous inhabitants.

In the 2018 interview, Toibin discusses his creative vision in building the James character. It is, he says, 'like all fiction, a sort of veiled autobiography, made of elaborated versions of the self that would otherwise remain hidden.' (p.223). He likens his Henry James to another of his characters, Eamon Redmond of his earlier novel, *The Heather Blazing.* These are figures

of middle-aged men who are alone a great deal, who have a certain sort of power, are haunted by certain memories, and are 'trying to function in the public world.' (p.225). The problem of believability raised by Lodge, is not something that troubles Toibin. He says, 'my contract with you is that you can read this without feeling undermined if you haven't read any other book in your life.' (2018, p.229). At the same time, he has a duty to the reader not to take liberties with inventing things that didn't happen, so that while he invents, for example, the character of Hammond at the Royal Hospital in Ireland, Henry James did go there to stay and there was a ball held. Toibin's approach to the biographical novel is summed up thus: '…the more I stick within the framework of the facts, the more I get from that, the more I feel that this is real and I have to make it more real'. 'You're anchored…and that anchor is not merely factual but emotional…it carries you…you get a great deal of energy from it.' (2018, p. 231). He expands on the variety of sources that inspire: 'I am using facts as anchors, and then I am using stories that I have heard, things that I have felt, and bits of things that I have felt from reading. They all make their way into the book.'(2018:232). The difference in approach each author takes to the same subject person is reinforced by their acknowledgements at the end of their texts. Lodge adds a nine-page exposition of not only his sources with full bibliographic detail, but an explicit delineation of where in the novel he has relied on biographical fact, and what scenes were purely of his imagination. His lengthy acknowledgements, and delineations between fact and fiction, contrasts sharply with those offered by Colm Toibin at the conclusion of *The Master.* His acknowledgement of sources (without bibliographic detail) and people who assisted, covers a single page. His use of primary source material is offered in a single sentence: 'I wish to acknowledge that I have peppered the text with phrases and sentences from the writings of Henry James and his family.' (2004).

To sum up the two approaches: Lodge wants to believe that his character and events are similar to the real person and events, whereas Toibin wants to create a work of art that is believable in terms of human nature, and does not have incorrect facts. This brings us back to the research question in this exegesis about authenticity. As observed in Chapter One, two—possibly contradictory—measures of authenticity have been employed by the critics in judging the artistic worth of these bio-fiction novels. One is the measure of the canon, that is, how far these bio-fiction novels meet the traditional demands of the novel form, for example in artistic originality; and two, trustworthiness (defined by the research question on authenticity) in interpreting the life of Henry James. The critics dilemma as outlined in Chapter One, that posit 'trust' and 'originality' at opposite ends of the genre spectrum, could

be resolved by asking the author what was his *intention* in writing his novel: was he trying to resemble biography in fictional form, or was he writing literary fiction? From the foregoing analysis, it would seem that Lodge and Toibin did have different intents. However, if the fictional form (whatever shape it takes) satisfies the various measures of authenticity, and at the same time, enhances what we know from the biographical record about an historical figure, then it is enough.

Summary and Conclusion

This comparative study of two novels has drilled down into the practice of writing biographical fictions to illustrate how biographic/historical evidence has been negotiated around authorial vision, imagination and experience. Differences emerge in the characterisation of the real-life personage based on these inputs, and the uses made of different novelistic devices towards achieving each novelist's vision of their subject. While both novelists have worked within the framework of the record to explore the inner life of their character, we have a different rendering of Henry James's personality. Lodge tends to rely more on what happens to James in the external world to give shape to character, while Toibin's heavier use of inner monologue through introspection, in my view, achieves a more vital character. James Wood best expresses what I mean here when he says that a literary character may have more to do with '…a larger, philosophical or metaphysical sense, our awareness that a character's actions are profoundly *important,* that something profound is at stake, with the author brooding over the face of that character like God over the face of the waters' (2009, p.98).

Authorial vision, drawn from assumptions and beliefs about their subject; and imagination drawn from experience, are critical inputs to the interpretation each author offers of their real life subject and explains divergence in characterisation. But it is well to remember that even the record may be suspect: as argued in Chapter One by Sukenick (1985) Kent (2018) and Mantel (2020), that the evidence we use to give shape to the past is always 'conjectural', 'partial' and often 'incomplete', and is 'always filtered through the creative mind'. I conclude that the Toibin novel that draws more heavily on the novelist's own experience and imagination—while keeping within the framework of the facts—is the more impactful in delivering a powerful poetic truth about human nature. Lodge's rendition, that by his own admission follows closely the biographical record, is a skilful use of novelistic devices, though the character of James tends to be submerged beneath the weight of historical detail. Both are believable renditions that have enhanced my knowledge of the 19th century

writer, Henry James, and indeed, by asking questions of the past informed by the present, these novels have broadened my knowledge of James' historical and cultural milieu.

In the following chapter, I seek to build on answering my research questions about truth and authenticity through an exploration of the process of creating a bio-fiction novel about the writer and social theorist, Olive Schreiner.

CHAPTER FOUR

Julia Novak (2016) argues that giving artistic expression to another's life and times requires self-reflection and some sense of purpose, like raising an interest in the writer and her oeuvre, or using her as a means to understanding colonialism or patriarchy. In approaching my creative production, I hoped to achieve both of these objectives, but I hoped also to be able to achieve something more and that is a kind of truth—something over and above historical truth— about my subject unexplored in biography. I contend, therefore, that a more sensitive and nuanced narrative that shapes a poetic trajectory of at least part of Schreiner's life, drawing on her literary works and epistolary, to imagine what she was thinking when she lifted her pen, enhances a 'straight' biography of the subject. As I proposed in Chapter One, knowledge, and the truth that it conveys, starts from asking questions about the past from the present, to understand that past as a universality of human experience. In Chapter Three, an exploration of the intersection between biography and imagination in two different novels about the same subject person revealed how fiction can convince through its own integrity and power.

In starting out on my writerly journey, I took my cue from Ridley Beeton (1987) who, while admiring the First and Scott biography (1980) of Olive Schreiner for its painstaking documentation and brilliant interpretation, says,

> '…despite these advantages [over earlier biographies], the woman *Olive Schreiner* herself doesn't seem to be present, moving through the pages with her famous and irritating magnetism. Something has been missed' (*Introduction*).

This was my challenge then, to make Olive more real in a way that biographers and historians cannot. To meet the task, I needed to see her humanity from the inside, to explore her interiority. But I also wanted to validate and dignify Olive's subjective experience, to recognise her choices, and thus to give her agency.

This chapter, then, aims to achieve three things: 1. to describe and defend the choices I have made in approaching my subject: 2. to illustrate how an imaginative knitting together of facts, and evidence, some elusive and found in disparate places, have enhanced what we know of Olive Schreiner: and 3. to show how a work of bio-fiction can meet the apparently competing demands for trust, reliability, and originality. I begin with an acknowledgement of the sources I have used as data input, and the method I have used in approaching my subject. This is followed by an exposition of the literary devices employed in writing 'A

Woman of Passion'. I then address my research questions, and show how the choices I made in the creative production process have answered these, and met my expectations of a bio-fiction novel.

Creating 'A Woman of Passion': Sources

In the Introduction to this exegesis, I stated that 'The authenticity of art…implies originality, and in the case of fiction, it implies the artist has used her creative imagination, drawing on novelistic devices to tell a story. However, can such a work be trusted as a reliable interpretation of the subject's life?' Following my 'paper trail' has been both exhaustive and exhausting, but if one is to claim biographical and spatial-temporal authenticity—as I have done in formulating the problem as a research question—it was a necessary start point. Sources for my work include both primary and secondary data. The major primary source used has been Olive Schreiner's letters. There are estimates of approximately 5,000 of her letters extant, but only a small proportion of these are relevant to the years that I chose to write about, that is, between 1890 and 1897. Letters for these years are collected in four separate volumes: Cronwright-Schreiner (1924b), Rive (1988), Draznin (1992), Stanley & Salter's 'Olive Schreiner Letters Online' (OSLO) and their hard-back South African collection (2012; L. Stanley, Salter, A., 2014). The most valuable for consistency across the years of relevance here are the Rive and Stanley collections. Other books of selected Schreiner letters and jottings are Ridley Beeton's 'Facets of Olive Schreiner: A Manuscript Source Book' (1987), and Uys Krige's 'Olive Schreiner: A Selection' (1968).

The second most important primary source was Olive's published works. I immersed myself in these, reading steadily and returning to them during the writing process. The most relevant of her works for my purposes, were those she crafted after her return to South Africa. These included short stories collected in the volume *Real Life and Dream Life* (1893), *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), *From Man to Man or Perhaps Only…*(1927, 2015), and *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923, 1992). In addition, her political papers, published variously in newspapers and magazines at the time, have been collected in a volume, *Words in Season* (Schreiner, 2005). A complete bibliography of Schreiner's oeuvre is available on OSLO (op.cit).

The third important primary source for my purpose was Cronwright-Schreiner's biography of his wife (1924a). Although a biography, I consider the volume a primary source because of the biographer's role as a character in my novel, and the autobiographical

data it contains. Other data inputs of a primary nature came from autobiographies, memoirs and the collected letters of people who knew and interacted with Olive during these years, and have made their way into my novel as characters: her niece, Dot (Gregg, 1957); Havelock Ellis (1940); George Seymour Fort (1942); James Rose-Innes (1949); and the collected letters of Mr John X Merriman (Lewsen, n.d.). In addition, I found scraps of letters that had been written by contemporaries about Schreiner.

Secondary sources consulted included all the Schreiner biographies. The Scott and First biography (1980) I found the most comprehensive, and so read it from cover to cover, learning something of Olive's early life and her years in England. From the rest, I restricted my reading to the years of interest. As earlier noted, however, only three of her biographers address in any considered way her marriage (Schoeman, 1992, Berkman, 1989, and Hobman, 1955). Biographies I read about significant others in Olive's world included: Cecil Rhodes (Rotberg, 1988); W.P. Schreiner (Walker, 1937); Havelock Ellis (Calder-Marshall, 1959); Edward Carpenter (Rowbotham, 2009); W.T. Stead (Robinson, 2012); and a biography of the suffragette and cousin of Adela Villiers, Lady Constance Lytton (Jenkins, 2015). I also consulted Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Ellis, 1900) as I understood he had used Olive as a subject in this study, though little was found to support this. As already noted, there is a wealth of scholarly articles about my subject; I read much and revisited some of these during the course of writing.

For experienced fiction writers, it may not be necessary to visit places they want to write about but for me, the site visits in South Africa were invaluable. I absorbed the country's topography, cultures and atmosphere, found it to be very like the country in which I had grown up in Western Australia. I developed a sense of the music of the Xhosa way of speaking English, and an appreciation of their humour. Though Olive lived in a different century, while reading her letters I was transported back to South Africa, its cultures and its peoples. My familiarisation with South Africa, as Kent found in her researches for her novels, allowed me to access characters from a place of empathy (2018). In Cape Town this included archival research at the Jagger library at CTU. Among the interesting scraps of letters and newspaper clippings in the library, I read a memoir written by Olive's grand-nephew, Will Stuart. He was a fatherless child, who had spent time at Groot Schuur, and had his education paid for by Rhodes. Stuart recalls in his memoir the big green marble bath, cut from one piece, that Rhodes installed there. It was a feature of the house noted by Rhodes' biographers, too. Groot Schuur (now Cape Town's official presidential residence) was not

open to the public during my visit. It was election time, and the President of the Republic was in residence. During these few days, I stayed nearby in the suburb of Rondebosch (the suburb where Schreiner's character Rebekah lived).

I drove to Grahamstown with an over-night stop at Matjesfontein. The hamlet is not much changed from Olive's day; the railway line that passes now links Cape Town to Johannesburg via Kimberley. The railway station building is the same, confirmed by comparing my own photograph with one reproduced in Schoeman's biography, of Olive standing on the platform. The railway restaurant is abandoned, replaced by a bar and dining room in the Lord Milner Hotel opposite. This is a grand old hotel built by the British during the Boer War as a hospital and R&R for its soldiers. Another grand building erected since Olive lived in the hamlet, is Mr Logan's bungalow. There is an 'Olive Schreiner cottage' among the half dozen buildings that line the road but it is of brick construction, and unlikely to have been the cottage she occupied which another photo of her standing outside, suggests was wood or iron. In Grahamstown, I visited NELM, the National English Literature Museum, where Schreiner records are kept, having been relocated from the small Cradock museum which now holds only a collection of photographs.

There was little further documentary information I needed to gather, but the visit to Grahamstown allowed me to meet and talk with the Emeritus Professor of English at Rhodes University, Paul Walters. Together with his colleague, Jeremy Fogg, I learnt much in conversation about the Schreiner and Cronwright families, and was treated to a slide show of photographs, including some old photos taken by Cronwright, of Olive's Reinterment on Buffelskop, and more recent ones of the visit there by the epistolary scholar, Richard Reeves. Walters and Fogg have begun work on a biography of Samuel Cronwright, and they directed me to his boyhood home in Grahamstown. Kimberley was too far removed to travel there, but I imagined it was not so very different from the semi-arid landscape and country towns of my childhood in Western Australia, and so I drew on these remembrances to recreate the 'Homestead' in its barren landscape, and the dry heat of summer.

Method —Approaching my Subject

To be as honest as I could with the evidence, cross-referencing between sources was a regular method while writing. From the huge quantity of resources available to me, the challenge was how to select that which mattered to my fictionalised narrative, and I turned to what I believed were the three most important aspects of Olive's life: work, marriage, and family.

Thinking about how to bring these three aspects of Olive's life together, I took from my reading two very personal troubles she endured. One was the death of her child, the other was the schism with her family that followed her speaking out against Rhodes. I knew from the letters and Cronwright's biography that the death of her baby daughter was to Olive, a devastating tragedy. Only later, after I had begun to write my story did I realise the full significance of the event. Contrary to surface appearances (she put on a brave face in her letters), the tragedy turned her around and inside out. She threw herself into a full-blown fight against the Cape Colony's political corruption that, she believed, would destroy her country and its peoples—a subliminal anger and escape from her maternal deprivation? Perhaps. Loss can make one angry, or at least make injustices more intensely felt. Or was it in her nature to try to 'put things to right', to correct the wrongs she saw around her? Olive was an idealist. She had demonstrated a propensity to political activism while living in England, and used her writing, her 'Dream' allegories, to this end. Even further back she had shown this side of her personality, when as a much younger woman she created a farm, the great 'anti-pastoral', to mimic the emptiness of colonial culture (J. M. Coetzee, 1988).

I had already decided that I wanted to see the world in which Olive found herself on her return, through her eyes. Colm Toibin's use of third person intimate as point of view seemed to me the best choice; I would tell my story through one consciousness only. But first, as Sellers says of her writing about Vanessa Stephens, I had to reach a point in my reading where my familiarity with Olive ignited her voice in my head. Her letters inspired my dramatization of a limited but significant span of her life, and quotes from them are peppered through the text. Using the researcher's method for seeking out information, sorting and analysing the vast quantity of data available, I asked questions, interrogating the data, looking for answers, and ways forward to enhance what we know from the record about her. I settled on the primary sources available to me: her letters, her husband's biography (a primary source for reasons argued above), and her literary output for the years after her return to South Africa. Her letters allowed me to see the world in which Olive found herself through her eyes—from the inside. However, I make no claim that her letters reveal what Olive was thinking at any point in time, because letters, too, can be fictions (wishful versions of the self) but they gave me access to her consciousness. Following the chronology of her letters, the daily events and interests in her life, also served to verify that I was being truthful with the facts.

Approaching Olive through her husband's biography brought me more closely into the relationship than any other biography could have, but again I read it with a sceptical eye

and events were cross referenced with her letters. The biography was helpful too, in giving me an insight to the biographer—her husband—and his personality. Other biographies about Olive Schreiner, I put to one side. For the reasons I argued in Chapter Two, I needed to distance myself from them in order to create my vision of her. Finally, as found in Chapter Three, my subject's literary works provided the axis on which my novel turns. Following her writing work through its pages, I was able to portray above all else, what mattered most to Olive.

During Olive's first year in Matjesfontein, she worked steadily on a second collection of short stories which was published in 1893 as *Dream Life and Real Life*. As I read through her subsequent non-fiction essays on South Africa, and her political treatise, 'The Political Situation', all of them written with a passion and a poet's eye, I could see these later works marked a shift away from her creative imaginings and competed with her attention to her unfinished novel, *From Man to Man*, a book that she had set her mind to complete when first she returned to South Africa. In Cape Town, she was no doubt looking for sources of intelligent conversation and inspiration as she had grown used to in England. Being courted by Cecil Rhodes for her fame and intelligence, her discussions with him on matters of 'policy' inevitably sparked her interest in her immediate world and took her writing in this new direction. The hiatus in her fiction writing—caused by the distractions of first Rhodes and then Cronwright—she overcame in the third year of her marriage by writing and publishing the novella, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland.* In this work, using her metier of allegory, Olive was once again able to wed imaginative processes with political objectives, something she had done in her earlier writing. The physical activity of writing aside, Olive never ceased thinking about the scientific book she hoped to write, on the matter of relations between the sexes and women's emancipation. This work, long in gestation, she most often referred to as her 'sex' book.

The scene in my novel where she is out riding with Cron, and they pass a Bywoner woman taking wares to market, draws attention to this ongoing interest, not always to the fore, but always there in her thoughts. Olive's art, her writing work, was always with her even during the myriad distractions she faced on her return to South Africa. By focusing on her work over these first seven years, I have been able to create the self of Olive; to see her as the artist she was. Her works inform us about her interests, and her narrative style reveals how she conveyed to the world her social and political ideas. Her writing engagement also demonstrates, as other bio-fictions about writers show, the tension that exists between the personal and the art.

Olive lives as a married or soon to be married, woman for half of the years covered in my novel. While some contemporary scholars as I noted in Chapter Two, have suggested her husband was a resentful man, too quick to point out his wife's foibles and failings, my re-reading of the biography allowed for a more nuanced understanding. I saw a man, much like any other husband, proprietorial, critical, but also someone who was clearly proud to have shared his life with 'a genius.' In the biography, he likens her to Pasteur and Newton, and her 'illuminating power' 'of the tribe of seers and prophets.' Searching through the Jagger library archives at the University of Cape Town, I found on a scrap of paper a letter written by Olive's friend, Alice Green, to her mother. It is dated January 1895 (one year after Olive's marriage): 'Olive S has just arrived with her husband 'Cron'. The dear fellow seems devoted to his wife and as proud of her as can be.'

A telling observation of Cronwright's character is found in a letter written by Havelock Ellis in 1930. The letter concerns the Cronwright-Schreiner biography. Ellis states: 'Of course I am far from admiring his [Cronwright's] deficiencies in literary skill and tact, and his own character—super virile, egotistic, accustomed to command—comes out only too conspicuously in his writing. But his character [deficiencies] makes his unfailing worship and devotion [to Olive] all the more remarkable.' (cited in Walters and Fogg, 2015). In his own words, Cronwright-Schreiner says, 'In Olive I have always felt I had a sacred trust.' In spite of the age difference then, he had the Nineteenth century view of a husband's responsibility, but not possession—unusual for the time, he had agreed to taking her name, and to the sharing of expenses.

Knowing Olive returned to South Africa in 1889 at the age of 34, I wanted to know what happened to her, what did it mean for her in meeting 'Cron', and why did she decide to marry him? She had told many people prior to her introduction to Cronwright, that she was not a marrying woman. Possibly it was, as she later said to Edward Carpenter, that her desire to have a child was great. It was the one thing Nineteenth Century women of Olive's class could not do without opprobrium, to give birth out of wedlock, though in her case, I question whether she would have bowed to these social strictures. The more likely scenario for her deciding to marry, is that Cronwright was the first man she had met that she felt she could live with in a marriage. He was eight years her junior and she would have seen herself as an enabler in the relationship. He managed a farm in the Eastern Provence of the Cape Colony, and this, too, might have seemed attractive to her. She had certainly used it to good effect by sending photos of herself and husband among their goats to WT Stead, editor of the *Review*

of Reviews. But above all these considerations, Olive's letters reveal that after the schism with Rhodes, she felt an almost unbearable loneliness.

In Chapter One, I argued for the truth of fiction in its own way: its capacity to see into the heart of things, to tell us what the past felt like from the inside, and to offer the reader a kind of universal truth that connects a personal story with the collective, past and present. As Hilary Mantel says, 'the dead have a vital force still. They have something to tell us, something we need to understand.' (2020). In approaching my creative production, I wanted to understand the complexity of her decision to marry, and what these first years sharing her life intimately were like for her. I wanted to hear her voice, to see the relationship through her eyes, to add a truth hitherto untold.

Family was important to Olive—her siblings, and her parents—and these relationships are explored in the many Schreiner biographies. I wanted to know who of her extended family she was closest to, how she interacted with them when she returned to South Africa a mature woman, and what pressures did they subject her to? Criticism of her came from the women in her family while her brothers were supportive of her. I read about her conflicted feelings towards her mother, and that Olive was especially fond of the brother closest to her in age. He was also the brother who gave her an entree to the governing class of the Cape Colony.

I asked questions about her friendships with men and women in the Cape Colony community. Critically, how did they measure up to her English friends? Were they able, for example, to provide her with the intellectual nourishment she had grown used to? With her women friends, she can only engage in matters domestic, until she meets Betty Molteno, but this does not happen until three years after her return. The men she engages with—her brother, Will, Seymour Fort, Rhodes, and Cronwright—offer Olive a more meaningful exchange. Beyond those in her immediate sphere, her letter writing to the friends in England enables her to maintain an intellectual nourishment of the mind. Her activity of letter writing then, regular and continuous, is necessarily part of the narrative.

Literary Devices: Character, Scene, Interiority, and Narrative Structure

Olive Schreiner was already a fully formed figure in my mind well before I began preparatory research. I knew what she looked like but it took a second viewing of the many photographs of her before I noticed the finer details of, for example, her slightly crooked smile, her mass of curly black hair, and her squat figure (she was five-foot tall). What is most striking in her appearance, are her large and intense dark eyes, causing Cronwright-Schreiner

to say of them, 'I wonder who ever before saw such eyes—power, tenderness, vitality, excessive liveliness, brightness, blazing intelligence, all were in those large brown eyes' (1924a). Taking as point of view, third person intimate or one consciousness, I could not describe her appearance as others may have seen her and so I used the actions of others to draw attention to these physical features. Her brother Will, would 'bend his head down and smother her dark curls in a kiss'; Seymour Fort would 'lean in and down' to kiss her. She had to 'stand on a chair to open the window latch'. Olive is, however, aware of her eyes, and borrowing from Toibin, 'she knew her eyes held a person in a sort of trance'. Mrs Cobb from the Men and Women's Club said Olive 'talked with her hands' (Walkowitz, 1986).

Certain personality traits are mentioned by others who knew her. Olive was quick moving, intense, intuitive with a 'lightening quick brain', impetuous, excitable, thin skinned probably, certainly restless. She enjoyed a joke. She was loving and beloved but according to her husband, she was prone to mental anguish. This is borne out in her letters. She also suffered severe bouts of asthma. Olive was not perfect. As she herself admitted, her idealistic temperament and overwhelming desire to help others often got her into trouble, and certainly weakened her ability to stay focussed on her work. A flaw she may not have been as conscious of, or at least less willing to admit, was a tendency to manipulate. Her friendship with Mary Sauer reveals this behaviour, taking from the relationship perhaps more than she was prepared to give. It was a pattern of behaviour, evident from the letters, that she seems also to have engaged in during her long relationship with Havelock Ellis. She continued to rely on his services after she had left England; to negotiate with her publishers on her behalf, to arrange for her work to be typed. And though Olive championed the poor and dispossessed she seemed to like hobnobbing with aristocrats and famous politicians.

Finding an authentic voice for my character was the critical starting point. A sense of authenticity in language, says Geraldine Brooks (2006), is one way to establish a belief in the character (Padmore, 2021). I also wanted Olive's voice to echo my vision of her, and strove to put myself in her shoes, to attain an 'empathetic bond' with my character. Olive was a successful writer and, at least to the external world, a woman self-assured and ready to speak her mind. I also wanted to show her humour and her humanity. While Colm Toibin uses dialogue sparingly, relying more on interiority to create his vision of the James character, my vision of Schreiner was of an extrovert nature, a woman with strong opinions and a zest for life. I can't know with any certainty what Olive thinks and feels at any particular moment, but it is the craft of the novelist to imagine the interior drama of her life, and guided by her letters, I used narrative voice through dialogue and interiority to build her character.

We first hear Olive's voice in an exchange with her landlord, Mr Logan, and later in Cape Town, in scenes with her friend Adela, and with Seymour Fort. With her brother, we learn something of her political interest and opinions as they discuss affairs of state. The scene in the railway restaurant with Mr Rhodes, and the dialogue that ensues gives a fuller expression to her thoughts about political and literary matters. From her assumed conversations—much of which has been drawn from the record, embellished and elaborated on—I was able to extrapolate and imagine what she is thinking during her exchanges with significant others.

I was guided in my selection of characters for the novel, both familial and other, by Olive's letters, Cronwright's biography, and the roles I could see certain characters playing as sounding boards for her thoughts and preoccupations. Cronwright occupies a central place in Olive's life, and dialogue between them is what moves the story forward. Writing the courting and later marital scenes, I had to think again about the character of 'Cron', how I imagined him, and how to give voice to that image? I took note of a diary entry he made while working on the biography of his wife. 'What memories are re-awakened. We were very much in love.' (cited in Walters and Fogg, 2015, p.114).

In my imagining of Cron, I kept coming back to Olive's agency in the relationship. Olive really was the more powerful and, as the real Olive had said in one of her letters, he was like a brother [and a young one at that]. In my novel, Cron is mostly a listener offering clarity to her shared thoughts, and consolation and comfort for her emotional upsets. The way they address each other reveals the nature of their relationship. Olive uses the term 'man', as in 'Oh, man!' She also uses the term of address, 'boy' or 'darling boy'. Cron does not use terms of endearment when he addresses her, not because he doesn't feel affection, but he is either too manly or perhaps the more respectful. But, the external world weighs heavy on her, and my Olive is prone to feelings of self-doubt and, at times, wretchedness. I wanted my 'Cron' to be a steadying influence on her in their marriage. It is not all smooth sailing, and the novel includes scenes where his frustration is indicated by short, pointed remarks, but outbursts between the lovers are few.

Her English correspondents, Stead, Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis are for much of the narrative, invisible actors but they are essential as sounding boards for Olive's thoughts, conveyed to them in letters. The voices I have given to people in Olive's immediate orbit, I have drawn from an image of their personalities based on what I have read about them. The character of Seymour Fort I first imagined as a sincere, clean young clerk that might conceivably play an 'everyman' role, but his involvement with the Governor's niece and

early departure from the scene, ruled him out of the role. Seymour Fort has his uses later in the narrative, in connecting Olive with the trooper. Later again, when he expresses 'jingo' sentiments, she realises how corruption can take hold when men depend for the livelihood on the powerful. Mr Merriman is a conceited man who believes women have no place in politics, while Mr Rhodes is a different character, attracted by Olive's intellect, and carrying a certain level of grace and charm in his manner. In Olive's exchanges with these men, dialogue enabled character building.

The character of 'Fan', her sister-in-law, is useful to my story in a number of ways. Her Dutch origins allow Olive to think about 'racial' division, and what 'miscegenation' might mean for the country's future. In conversation with Seymour Fort about Fan, the reader learns more about the cultural diversity and politico-territorial divisions in South Africa. The character of Fan also allowed me to draw out Olive's views about women. For example, the afternoon tea with Fan's women friends, where Olive tries to avoid joining in because of the trivial conversation that takes place, and later, when Olive reflects on Fan's early jealousy towards her, and the agony she feels about women who are not always loyal to their own kind. This agony forces itself into her writing 'The Woman's Rose'. This scene is the first of several throughout the narrative that show how Olive's thoughts transmute into her art.

Characters who play minor roles in the narrative are the farmer, Charles Webber, Alice Corthorn, Mary Sauer and Betty Molteno. Though Webber is mentioned in Cronwright's biography as a farmer friend and best man at his wedding, the record tells us little more about Webber. Olive's letters make a fleeting reference to him. I worked on his character to make Charles an endearing and supportive friend to the Cronwright-Schreiners, knowing that all couples must have such a person they can trust and rely on. Blending source information with imagination, I recreate the ride Olive takes with him and Cron, and the devastating miscarriage she subsequently suffers.

Mary Sauer, wife of a member of the political class, is the first woman (excluding the young Adela) with whom Olive establishes a warm friendship in the Colony. Betty Molteno meets Olive in Matjesfontein, and a new friendship blossoms between women of like mind. Alice Corthorn does not enter the story until the last. Alice is brought into the story more for her house in Kensington than for herself (though her work in India, developing a vaccine against the cholera epidemic has a contemporary resonance). I wanted Olive and Cron to have a place in London where they could be alone, and not as the record says, with another married couple. Alice had been an important friend to Olive Schreiner during her earlier days living in London, and I was surprised to read in the Jagger library, a letter where Olive

describes her friend as an 'overwrought high tensioned person who breaks one down'. From this, I was able to create character and scene that fitted the personality described. Beyond this, I stick closely to the record of Olive's various meetings with people in London, enlarging upon these meetings where there are silences in that record, allowing my own imaginings to fill the gaps. We know, for example, that her publisher, Fisher Unwin, almost halved what he had initially promised her for *Peter Halket.* I tried to imagine how that would have felt for Olive, having once climbed the heights of fame, and I wanted to create a scene where she tries to negotiate with him a better deal for herself.

Scenes in my novel, then, have been a blending of references to events in the source materials, and imagination. Scenes created have also been inspired by what I have read in the scholarship about Olive's spirituality which was both humanistic and naturalistic. Her love of nature is personified in her portrayal of landscape and animals in her work. In my novel, I try to show this aspect of her emotional attachment in various actions/scenes— caressing the petals of flowers, pressing a wildflower for Havelock, her excitement at the storm bursting in the heavens, bathing in the river at Kranz Plaats, rolling naked in the sand at the top of a kopje, and in her imploring letters to Carpenter to share with her the beauty of the country. Her dog and her pet monkey are characters in my story, even the leopards who she tells Carpenter, she 'loves better than politicians'. In this way, my subject's love of nature is brought to the fore, incorporating what we know from the record about her, into the fictional narrative.

When Olive reflects on her past life as a governess, and how she upset both her sister and her employer Erilda Carwood, the reader learns about Olive's rejection of doctrinal religion. As a child, her first literature was the Bible and in the scene with Rhodes on the train to Bloemfontein, Olive recites memorised passages from it. In another scene, she engages in a kind of self-flagellation after her friend Mary's departure from Matjesfontein, where we see Olive taking to her bed, muttering parables from the Book of Matthew, in an anguish for letting her friend down. It is not, however, until Olive is once again in England promoting her novella, where she is visited by Holy men of the church, and we hear her voice in dialogue with them, that her views on the matter of religion and spirituality are fully expounded. These latter meetings and exchanges are drawn from the Cronwright biography.

Creating a sense of place and atmosphere is essential in adding interest and authenticity to a story. I wanted to capture the South African landscape through using the sun (rather than moon), its horizontal setting creating an atmosphere of horizontality and distance. I use scent and elements to evoke the landscape: the Karroo bush after rain, the salty

scent of the sea, and the gulls gathering on a windswept shore. In Kimberley, it is heat that 'bounces off the tin roof', and the dry and the red dust are features of this landscape. The Cape Town landscape is different and when Olive visits her family, 'casting her eye along the avenue' she is struck by the lush green of the tree lined street, and the beauty of Table Mountain always renders her momentarily speechless. In England, it is the scents of gorse flower and damp moss, rolling clouds across grey skies, and the unsettling cold that evoke Olive's experiences.

Reflection and Introspection

While Olive does not endure isolation for long between visits to Cape Town, she lives alone in Matjesfontein for three years before she meets Cron. As a consequence, she spends a lot of time in her head, and on her writing. Reflections on her time in England, come and go, some of which I have written as short scene: memory of the Men and Women's club, her friendship with Karl Pearson, her visits to Alassio, and further back to her youth before she left South Africa for England. My intention in using reflection was not to extend the biographical detail but rather to illuminate my protagonist's peculiar responses in the present. There is a haunting quality about these reflections on her past life, and often they will prompt her to write a new story or return to one she has put aside. The 'Buddhist Priest's Wife' is an example here, of her wrestling with the memory of Karl Pearson. This suggests, as Toibin suggests with his character, Olive is working her life into her art. However, as commentators have noted, this is not a static process; the self of the writer is in endless process, transforming itself into images. Gusdorf (cited in Clayton) puts it thus: 'there is a never ending dialogue of a life with itself in search of its own absolute.' (1985, p.34).

The dream device was one favoured by Olive in her allegorical stories. I use dream in my narrative, but rather as a device for showing my protagonist's interiority and introspection, so they are told in a realist way as night-time dreams. The first of these follows her conversation with Seymour Fort where she tells him about the prostitutes in London she helped. In this dream scene, I incorporate some of Schreiner's own writing. Those who have read *From Man to Man* will recognise in my recreation, elements of a scene from the chapter 'How the rain rains in London'. The second dream scene in my narrative is of Rhodes with his throat cut. It is lifted, verbatim, from Olive's letter to WT Stead where she vividly describes the dream she has had about Rhodes. I wanted to use her words about the dream unchanged because it encapsulates so much of her mixed feelings about the man. Her journalist friend, Stead, is not discreet, and in a later imagined scene, Rhodes relates to

an embarrassed Olive what Stead has told him. Towards the end of the novel, prior to her departure for England with Cron, I imagined how she might be feeling—the excitement of going—and created a dream scene: she is among the literati of London, Cron is present but distant, hovering in the background, presaging perhaps, her resolution at the end of the novel.

So, what are the silences, the erasures in the record, and how are they to be dealt with? Schreiner's epistolary was a valuable source for understanding her 'secret life', and I returned to these artefacts to imagine what she was thinking as she penned each letter. The frankness and unaffected style of her letters are revealing: reading the space between the lines, it was not difficult to see her intention in writing them. Despite her disarming directness common to all her letters, I detected a tone unique to whomever they were addressed. Her letters to Edward Carpenter, for example, always included some illustration of her commitment to socialist ideals, most often by bagging the 'capitalist' greed she saw around her. At the same time, she hungered for communion with a mind like Carpenter's and never gave up trying to entice him out to South Africa. Alongside her damning critique of the country's politics, she drew sketches of its natural beauty. The mixed messaging in these letters gave me an insight to Olive's interiority, her inner struggle, her troubled relationship with South Africa and its peoples. It is not only her letters to Carpenter, but other letters she wrote to Ellis, and others, reveal an insecurity. For example, in her letters to those with whom she felt less certain of their affection, she would sign off, 'You need not reply', suggesting a real fear of rejection.

In my novel, words from Olive's letters are selectively reproduced to illustrate her dilemmas, fears, and sadness, but the scenes created around her letter writing are imagined. Olive's letters to Cron prior to marriage are self-examining. Her 'confession' letter is an example of her self-interrogation. Out of this letter, I have created the scene where she ponders on why she wants to tell him about her 'wicked' past. This launched me into a longer imagined discursive of the train ride to Grahamstown, and what she experienced there.

Eros and death in Greek literature are concepts always connected. In two passages in different parts of my narrative, Olive reflects on her erotic experiences. In the first, she recalls her 'phantom' pregnancy and it is this, she believes, that lead to her developing adult asthma. The second scene of reflection on past erotic experiences she will keep hidden from Cron, but her experienced sexual self is revealed to the reader in the scene of their confessionals by the river. In other scenes, we see Olive struggling for breath, and her preoccupation with death is made manifest in her tendency to write wills, believing she may die before the age of forty. Morbid thoughts surround her during her pregnancy, and with

good reason. Infant mortality was high in the nineteenth century, and her experience of it among family and friends is revealed in selected passages. When she loses her own child, her life seems to eclipse her fiction. I imagine the scene where she tells Cron she wants to read again her story about Lyndall (her protagonist in *African Farm*). And, months after the physically damaging birth experience, Olive wants to comfort her husband with intimacy and he expresses fear of hurting her, but she knows 'other ways' of bringing release.

Scene as Interplay between Imagination, Experience and Evidence

Toibin and Lodge whose various parallel scenes in their respective novels are clearly drawn from biography, each has his own way of reimagining these scenes. Similarly, wherever I took inspiration from biographical information or from Olive's letters to write a scene, these were through my re-imaginings, drawing on my experiences, or what I have read or seen. The marriage scene, for example, is discussed in some detail in the Cronwright biography, and I drew inspiration from it to write my own version—through Olive's eyes. In the happy months of marriage before her pregnancy, Olive shows signs of restlessness, she seems unable or unwilling to settle to her writing. After a time, she begins to crave space and separation. At Krantz Plaats, her asthma plagues her. She has a solution that is not acceptable to her husband. Using scene, character, and interiority, I imagine how this early marital conflict plays out, and I introduce here the characters of Cron's mother and Erilda Carwood, both of whom subject Olive to their old-fashioned morality. I knew such women when I became a young mother, considered by some, too young to take on the role. My experience reflects a common truth and probably a universal truth when women have to negotiate around the 'wisdom' of their elders (mothers-in-law, older sisters or aunts).

The first scene I wrote was in fact the birth and death of Olive's child. I was particularly inspired to write this scene more or less as I imagined it happening, by a letter Olive had written to Cron during the Anglo-Boer War—the sixth year after the child's death. There seemed to be in that letter a wound and a silence. Because she is prevented from speaking by an overwhelming sadness at the time of the child's death, I reproduce these words, having her write them in the present. The birth and death scene, and the grief that ensues, illustrates—for women who have given birth and for others who have experienced the tragedy of loss—the truth of fiction found in universal experience. As Sellers says, 'the primary concern of [writing a novel] is to help the reader experience…' (2018, p.211). There is a poignancy about these scenes, and it marks a turning point in my novel, and concludes Part II in the narrative.

Olive used metaphor a lot in her writing. For example, in her essay on 'The Englishman', Ireland 'hangs at England's side like a dislocated arm'. I attempted a reflected metaphor in writing the scene of Cron returning from a cricket match with a broken arm (in fact, he had broken his arm falling off a bike). Cron's discomfort and hurt pride allows the scene to open out and draws in Olive's growing exasperation and anxiety about the jingoism against the Dutch Republic that Cron has heard at the cricket match.

I created scenes not written in any biography or letters, but imagined from clues found in things said fleetingly, or not said, or in names redacted from her letters by a husband biographer who was trying to protect his dead wife's, or his own good name without any real sense of posterity. Seymour Fort was one such casualty of the husband biographer's pen, as was Karl Pearson. The real-life secretary of the Governor, Mr George Seymour Fort, and the Governor's niece, Miss Adela Villiers, and their fraught relationship is an imagined scene built on scraps of clues and a stray letter found in the Stanley (2014) collection.

The scenes with Mrs Minnie Walters in England are wholly imagined. There are no extant letters between Olive and Minnie, yet in a letter Olive had written to Havelock, I learnt that she much admired the woman. I brought Mrs Walters into the story because I wanted my Olive's passion for working class achievements in the home country revealed. I could have given this role to Eleanor Marx (who in 1893 had not yet committed suicide) but it suited the historical record and its intrigue better to have Eleanor and her notorious partner, Aveling, the subject of scuttlebutt and shared recollections between Minnie and Olive, (one of Olive's letters recounts the bad feelings she had about Aveling). The preceding scene of Olive on the train to Bradford, I created as a prelude to these sympathetic exchanges. The men on the train, one who reads *The Times* and the other who is travelling without a ticket, act as a metaphor for the harshness of the English class structure, and highlights Olive's feelings about it.

Other scenes imagined were triggered by a fleeting reference in Olive's letters. In one, addressed to her Cape Town friend, Mary Sauer, she apologises for things she said 'last night'. This inspired me to write the dinner party scene at Mary's house, to reveal Olive's opinionated and excitable self. The scene also allowed me to draw into the story members of the political class, characters with whom Olive would continue to engage throughout these years. A short scene, told in flashback, is of Will Stuart, the fatherless child who spends time at Groot Schuur. The 'big green marble bath' mentioned in Stuart's memoir and in biographies of Rhodes, intrigued me sufficiently to write it into the novel, an allusion,

perhaps, to something else (here, I was thinking of a disturbing scene in Joan London's *Gilgamesh*).

When thinking about how to bring to life Olive's story of *Trooper Peter Halket*, I imagined her meeting a Trooper Peter Smith, a young man from war-torn Mashonaland who is suffering what today we call PTSD. We know from conflicts of war, the damage that can be caused to soldiers, numbers of whom suicide over what they have done or witnessed. This is a universal truth of war, and another example of fiction's capacity to convey the universality of human experience. Though it happened in fact that Olive met young men returning from the Interior who told her about events there, Peter Smith is a wholly imagined character. He acts as a trigger for me and my protagonist, to write her novella, *Peter Halket.*

The servants that come into Olive's life, first in Matjesfontein and then in Kimberley, are my fictional creations, as are the railway gangers. I hesitated over my depiction of them, concerned that I may be reproducing stereotypes from a white writer's perspective. Their presence in the narrative is compressed as they would have been in Olive Schreiner's day, and yet their part in my narrative is significant because they are a marker of race relations in South Africa, and a trigger for Olive's writing. The little girl, Aya, reminds Olive of the story she wrote for her brother's college magazine. Years later in Kimberley, she turns her pen to writing a long essay on 'The Problem of Slavery'. What had inspired her to write this provocative essay? The answer is suggested in a letter Olive wrote to a friend about meeting her 'coloured' neighbours. I was thus able to weave together these acts—the meeting and the composing. And, as we see her writing the allegorical story *Trooper Peter Halket,* her sense of racial injustice comes to the fore most powerfully. But Olive is not above racial prejudice, and in later dialogue with her husband prior to their departure from Kimberley, he challenges the limits of her sympathy.

Liz Stanley has undertaken a great deal of research on South Africa's colonial past, and is herself a Schreiner scholar. In a special issue of the *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (2020), she addresses post-colonial theorising, and in particular, the implications of writing about a white South African during the period. Stanley acknowledges the practice of bio-fiction 'has wider resonance than the (quasi) genre given this name.'(p.470). However, she correctly observes that the South African experience is complicated, and argues that the view that racism maps onto a binary colour line is less than helpful. Many Afrikaners suffered grievously during the Anglo-Boer War, for example, and the idea that black peoples themselves in South Africa are an uncomplicated block is problematic, for it

denies their history of tribal difference and conquest. She cites King Shaka of the Zulu nation as illustrative of black expansionism, and argues it was itself a variant of imperialism.

Other of Olive's conflicted views about political and social matters are exposed in scenes imagined from references to events in her letters. When Cron returns from Kimberley with the news that the manager of the diamond mine has been arrested for gun running, Olive is pleased to see 'British justice' in action. Despite all her criticism of English capitalists, she remained steadfastly loyal to a belief in British law and justice. At the end of my novel, the 'burking', or white-washing of the inquiry into the Jameson raid, delivers her loyalty a mortal blow. Yet her faith in the English intellectual mind saves her, when she receives a letter of inquiry from an economics journalist working on a theory that corresponds with her own idea of 'the matrix' of power and imperialism.

The scene on the boat to England with Cron is a re-imagining of the story told in his biography. Coming across 'Tony', Rhodes' man servant, in their cabin, was an intriguing passage (the biography does not specify what the man was searching for), and I wanted to make it more real. I imagined Olive's prized possession, the poster of the hanging tree, being secreted out of the country to London. Other boat scenes—travelling with her women friends, Betty and Alice, Rhodes' unpleasant companions, Rhodes sending his sister to talk to Olive—are imagined recreations from the letters and Cronwright's biography. In this way, I share with Toibin his sentiment: '…the more I stick within the framework of the facts, the more I get from that, the more I feel that this is real and I have to make it more real' (Toibin, 2018, p. 231).

Historical Context

Following Toibin on the matter of historical detail, I consciously avoided the distraction of period detail, such as nineteenth century dress and manners, including speech, because I wanted my novel to be read from Olive's perspective only, and she would not have been commenting on this kind of detail. Consequently, my artefact achieves a certain contemporariness. The novel is, in part, about a set of historical events already charted. To write a bio-fiction that gathered around it so dramatically the political turbulence of the time and Olive's place in it was not my intention when I began my research. In fact, I knew very little about these events. However, I soon discovered this context was impossible to avoid if I was to be true to history and my character's place in it. As Olive wrote to Havelock Ellis, 'I turn with such a keen kind of relish to the external world'. Her involvement with Cecil Rhodes, soon to be Premier of the Cape Parliament, his respect for her as a writer, and her

initial respect for him as a man of 'genius', was a relationship that could not be ignored. We see its eventual unravelling in scenes of Olive's engagement, then distancing herself.

Once she is married to Cron who wishes, as she does, to expose Rhodes' corruption, my narrative went in an unexpected direction. While I kept trying to pull it back to the routine of Olive's daily life, these externalities—the Matabele wars and the Jameson raid—were, I realized, her pre-occupations. Her letters reveal she was fully embedded in the political events and daily crises of plots and intrigue; it was impossible to separate my character from them. No matter how grave, this history of South Africa, Olive's place in it authenticates her lived experience. From these experiences, Olive was inspired to write her non-fiction essays, polemical papers, and eventually her novella. By focussing on Olive's writing practice during these crises, I was able to re-centre my subject, delve into her introspections and her deeply held passions. Juxtaposing her writing 'The Englishman' and 'Trooper Peter Halket', allowed me to draw attention to Olive's own powerful observation, remarkable for its time, of the hypocrisy of colonialism, euphemistically described as spreading peace and civility.

Finally, it was not Rhodes, or her asthma (my initial idea), but rather South Africa personified that became the antagonist in my story. Olive's trips to England, just before marriage and later with her husband, reignite a sense of her inner self, her real self that had been submerged in her years in South Africa, and she realizes what a death (metaphorically) it would be to return there. This then, is the wholly imagined last chapter of the novel. She is planning to stay in England and how to tell Cron in the least hurtful way troubles her to the last breath. I know from the record that she does not stay, that she returns with him and lives through the Anglo-Boer war, and South African Union. However, I wanted to foreshadow what we know of her leaving South Africa, and Cron, for England many years later. In the record, there are normative and speculative explanations for why she left. It is conjectural and I wanted to open up the question and leave it open. It was to this end that I imagined my novel's concluding paragraphs.

I have approached my creative production in the spirit of a novelist rather than a biographer, adopting a realist narrative style. I have adhered to the known facts of Olive Schreiner's life between the years 1890 and 1897, but in my creative vision I have imagined an inner life for my subject. The most important source documents in this endeavour have been her letters. They opened up to me Olive's world, and I have relied on them to sign post the chronology of events and her engagement with them during this period in South Africa. More than this, a reading of the letters 'between the lines' revealed a vital but conflicted

personality. I saw what was important to her, what were her fears and foibles, her hopes and ambitions. Reading Schreiner's published works added another dimension of richness and complexity, and a deeper understanding of the woman and her passions. Cross referencing between her letters and her literary output meant that I was able to show in the narrative how Olive's thoughts transmute into her art. My task, then, was to imagine Olive Schreiner's life on the page in scenes, reflections and introspection. It was to put flesh on the bones, to see her humanity, and to give her agency.

Narrative Structure

The introductory section of a novel says Schabert, 'anticipates the curve of the life that is going to be related'. (2017, p.287). The opening chapter of 'A Woman of Passion' sets the tone: British colonial 19th Century, and introduces the story's protagonist as a woman writer of notable fame. The railway acts as a kind of leitmotif—something the reader shouldn't notice but is always there. Nonetheless, its centrality to the unfolding story, becomes a metaphor for Olive's restlessness, for diamonds, for politics, for friendships made, and ultimately for political corruption in the Colony. The chapter concludes with an allusion to romance.

The structure of a novel embodies story and plot—the interrelated sequence of events, the cause and effect of action in the narrative. The dramatic novel typically follows a narrative arc of exposition, an inciting incident, rising action, crises, climax, falling action and resolution. As I suggested in Chapter Three, however, the narrative arc of drama is not necessarily suited to a bio-fiction novel that follows the events of a person's daily life. Looking back on my story, I see elements of a dramatic arc—the interrelated sequence of events following a recognisable plot structure. This structure leant itself to a natural organisation of the twenty-three chapters into three parts. I haven't named these parts though I think of them as follows: Part 1 Embracing the External World; Part 2 Courtship, Marriage and Death; Part 3 Political Activism and Resolution.

As I wrote the last chapter of Olive's embarkation for England and what happened to her there, I sensed a coming together of all the threads that had gone before, her personal sufferings, her moments of elation, a renewed sense of self, a reckoning of what she had been unable to change, but hope in what might still be possible. Place—in London, and later with Havelock Ellis and his wife in Cornwall—were the right locations and people that provided me with the architecture to bring my story of Olive to a resolution.

Writing Biographical Fiction: What has been learnt?

I wondered about my 'authorial vision' of Olive Schreiner and I returned to Julia Novak's argument about the need to reflect on purpose and effect. Contesting the image of my subject preserved in some Schreiner biographies and scholarship about her most personal of relationships was not a purpose, but rather a motivating factor in choosing the period of her life I have written about. The intentional effect of the novel's representation of Schreiner was, in the first instance, to raise awareness about this extraordinarily intelligent woman from history. And to draw attention to her dynamic political and personal agency—an agency rare for a woman of the late Nineteenth century. By extending her 'afterlife' through my artefact, another perhaps less intentional effect has been to canonize and commemorate a notable woman in society's 'cultural memory' (Novak, 2016, p.84). In this respect, as Novak suggests, my biographical novel may serve as a feminist instrument.

An unintentional representation of my subject is likely to have arisen as a result of 'putting myself in her shoes'. Toibin says, 'like all fiction, [*The Master*] is a sort of veiled autobiography, made of elaborated versions of the self that would otherwise remain hidden'(Toibin, 2018, p. 223). Forster spoke of 'Homo Fictus' as special because 'we can know more about him than we can know about any of our fellow creatures, because his creator and narrator are one'. I now recognise that my feelings about this shifted over the course of writing the novel. I did not see my creative vision of the historical figure as an 'elaborate version of the self'. I have known women like Olive, women who I have admired for their courage, vitality, and their genuine feminist sentiment, and I was at times reminded of these women in the process of reading the literature. As I began to write, however, I found myself increasingly identifying with my character, to the point of feeling at times that I was channelling her. I felt her passion for justice, and her anger at what is unjust. Whether we live in the 19th century or the 21st, little changes in the way of human behaviour and there is, in the present century, a lot to be angry about. At a domestic level, I empathised with her need to negotiate distance from an ever-present husband, to allow her space in which she could write and think. And, how the sharing of space between intimates creates a co-dependency, in itself a beautiful if at times frustrating thing. I do not, however, agree with Clayton's claim that Schreiner perceived marriage and artistic work as mutually exclusive (1997). Olive created much artistic work during these early years of marriage, and putting on a pot roast may have been a form of relaxation of the mind rather than a serious disruption to her writing. Moreover, the loneliness Schreiner suffered prior to marriage had its own dragging effect on her ability to create.

Above all, what I have learnt from the creative process is that it was absolutely essential for me to put myself in Olive's shoes, or more accurately, in her head, to live with her each day of my writing, to feel what she felt, to move with her in the rhythms of her life. While I have followed the same research methods used by biographers, in reading letters, biographies, and scholarship, I have selected from these, perhaps at times sub-consciously, to fit with my vision of Olive Schreiner. In the hands of another writer, a different story, even a different version of the same historical personage might emerge. This possibility brings us back to the arguments of meta-history and biography raised in the first chapter. For Hayden White, all historical texts are literary artefacts. In the Conclusion to the exegesis, I return to my research questions about knowledge and authenticity.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this exegesis, I proposed that my research questions would be answered dialectically, identifying the problems and possibilities through both practice and argument: writing a novel, an imaginative work, about a real historical figure, and reflecting on that process to make the case for fiction's capacity to enhance our knowledge of the subject. My research began with a question mark against the biographical record, so that writing a novel about a real historical figure is not simply about filling gaps in the record, or bringing clarity to obfuscations in the scholarship, but about questioning the evidence-based objectivity in non-fiction narratives. Following White, I argued in Chapter One that the bio/historical records are 'meta-histories', with their own subjective interpretations. I surveyed the ground of the bio-fiction novel and debates around it. The post-modern turn in literary theory was found to have facilitated a blurring of the lines between narrative forms—between fact and fiction—so that the bio-fiction novel freed from the fetters imposed by modernists, has become a popular genre.

Chapter Two introduced the subject of my novel, Olive Schreiner, the woman and her art. I then interrogated the biographical record of her, to establish the gaps, the silences, the misrepresentations. I argued that the Schreiner scholarship is a contested space where interpretations of her life, framed by the assumptions and ideologies of the biographer, have produced multiple interpretations or 'truths'. A biographical novel, therefore, may represent another form of truth. In Chapter Three, I compared two bio-fiction novels written about the writer Henry James. The purpose here was to illustrate how the authors negotiated the biographical record with their authorial vision of James, and how they have used their imagination and experience to create their stories about the nineteenth century writer. While each author relied on the same historical and biographical evidence, it was found that their interpretations of the James figure were markedly different. In this sense, both novels can be said to be authentically original but it also draws attention to the arguments made throughout the exegesis that the evidence we use is always partial, conjectural and incomplete.

The novel form and its literary devices—voice, scene and reflection —is a unique medium, that carries emotional power and imagination for the writer and the reader, enabling a deeper understanding of the subject and her context. Chapters One and Three illustrated the different uses made of these literary devices by other novelists. Constructing an inner life

through the device of third person intimate brings the reader into the subject's psyche, so that we see the highs and lows of the character's emotional existence—her humanity.
In Chapter Four, I made the case for why third person intimate point of view was important in achieving my vision of Olive Schreiner. Reading and listening to her own words in her letters and literary work, I was able to create an interiority for my subject that validated and dignified her experience in the world.

My argument, however, also required a defence of the narrative form, and I formulated my research questions accordingly.

Question 1 How can biographical fiction enhance what we know about an historical figure from the biographical record?

If at some future date, someone somewhere wishes to write the ninth biography of Olive Schreiner, and they set about reading the previous eight biographies of her, and ask me why they should read my novel, my answer would be as follows.

'A Woman of Passion' fills the glaring gaps and erasures in the record, particularly those years of her early married life, but more than this, it adds another dimension to the record, which is the interior drama of Olive Schreiner's life. The fictional narrative form and its literary devices, enabled me to create the character of Olive in her historical and cultural milieu. It offers a poetic trajectory of her life, but one that is based in true facts and recorded evidence. Through the power of her own voice and my imagination, I have created a drama that explores her interiority, her agency in making choices, and her vitality through all the love, heartache and turmoil of seven significant years of her life. The truth of biographical fiction, as I have argued in this exegesis, is the truth of human nature—what it is like to be alive—and the universality of human experience. It is what connects us in the present to our collective past; what resonates for us when we read of the history and the personalities of a place and a time. In writing my novel about Olive Schreiner, I drew on my own lived experiences of the personal and the political in human nature—love, deceit, generosity and greed, trauma and survival—and my emotional responses to them, to craft that kind of truth.

Question 2 On what grounds can the fictional narrative form defend itself as an authentic interpretation of a life?

Because of its myriad understandings and uses, authenticity as a concept, and agreement on its meaning, can be elusive. When writing historical fiction, authenticity can be measured in spaciotemporal terms, and likewise, when writing bio-fiction, authenticity rests

on known biographical fact. The choices I made in the creative writing process demonstrate a commitment to and reliance upon these tangible measures of authenticity. I have shown how my creative vision for my subject was realised through an imagination anchored in the historical/auto/biographical record. My evidence has been drawn primarily from my subject's letters, her oeuvre, and the auto/biographies of significant others. Following the chronology of her letters, I can verify that I have followed faithfully the daily events and interests in her life. The painstaking work of research, of identifying factual places, events and people presented in this exegesis, and incorporated into the novel through a knitting together of the record with imagination and experience, are my grounds for a defence of the fictional narrative form as an authentic interpretation of the life of Olive Schreiner.

The authenticity of the work as art must rest on certain value judgements. How is the artistic value of a work of fiction to be measured in a novel that draws heavily for its composition on the historical/auto/biographical record? I have argued that my motive was to create a work for its own sake, as an alternative narrative to biography, one that brings another dimension to the subject and her history. 'A Woman of Passion' is the first novel length work written about Olive Schreiner. The authenticity of the work will inevitably be felt and judged by readers. Using the novel form's techniques and literary devices such as narrative voice, and my own sense of integrity in being truthful to the facts, I have blended these various measures of authenticity and associated data to bring to life this remarkable woman from history.

Further Research

In approaching bio-fiction there are some questions of theory and method that have been raised but not addressed in this exegesis, and that might prove fruitful areas for future research. The question of genre specificity, for example, remains an open one: where to situate biographical fiction in the literary theory discourse? And what of its value? Is distance from the biographical record a determinant of how we define a creative work of bio-fiction? Is it, for example, correct to claim that the further distant from the record a biographical novel is, the closer it comes to being literary fiction? What has been established is that the biographical novel as a focus of academic attention in Australia remains largely unexplored, or at least not recognised as a specific genre. This is despite the more recent examples of the form coming from Grenville (2020) and Keneally (2020). These are historical novels but they are also biographical novels, their protagonists offering readers insight on the lives, however speculative and contested, of real people from history. I would

argue that much more needs to be done in this country to recognise what the genre has to offer for writers and readers alike.

The Reader

My hope is that my manuscript will be published and read by South African, Australian and British readers, but I recognise that each will have their own particular positionality in relation to the text. South Africans may be divided over its treatment of their history and the characters within, as told by an outsider. Olive Schreiner's influence on white South African writers is an established fact, and today in South Africa, many readers, if they are white, speak of her with pride, *The Story of an African Farm* having been a set text in their schools. In Australia, few people have heard of Olive Schreiner, and even though we share much as post-colonials with roots in the same British Empire, few have a knowledge of the Cape Colony that was. Those who were oppressed by that imperial conquest in both our countries will read this story differently. A British reader will approach the text from a different positionality again, though it offers such a reader with an interest in their country's history much that will be new to them. Olive Schreiner's contribution to the history of feminist and socialist thought in Britain is well recognised and respected, but she was a controversial figure on the English landscape especially during the Anglo-Boer and Great Wars. Given the growing interest in stories of past lives, my creative production will, I hope, be of value to readers not just of fiction, but just maybe, readers of history and biography too.

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