

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

BY
OLIVE
SOEHLINGER

A TALE OF LIFE IN THE
BOER REPUBLIC.

(Continued From Last Week.)

She made her way past the fiddlers and a bench full of tired dancers and passed out at the front door. On the "steep" a group of men and boys were smoking, peeping in at the windows and cracking coarse jokes. Waldo was certainly not among them, and she made her way to the carts and wagons drawn up at some distance from the homestead.

"Waldo," she said, peering into a large cart, "is that you? I am so dazed with the tallow candles I see nothing."

He had made himself a place between the two seats. She climbed up and sat on the sloping floor in front.

"I thought I should find you here," she said, drawing her skirt up about her shoulders. "You must take me home presently, but not now."

She leaned her head on the seat near to his, and they listened in silence to the stifled twanging of the fiddlers as the night wind bore it from the farmhouse and to the ceaseless thud of the dancers and the peals of gross laughter. She stretched out her little hand to feel for his.

"It is so nice to lie here and hear that noise," she said. "I like to feel that strange life beating up against me. I like to realize forms of life utterly unlike mine." She drew a long breath. "When my own life feels small and I am oppressed with it, I like to crush together and see it in a picture, in an instant, a multitude of disconnected unlike phases of human life—a medieval monk with his string of beads pacing the quiet orchard and looking up from the grass at his feet to the heavy fruit trees; little Malay boys playing naked on a shining beach; a Hindoo philosopher alone under his banyan tree, thinking, thinking, thinking, so that in the thought of God he may lose himself; a troop of Bacchanals dressed in white, with crowns of vine leaves, dancing along the Roman streets; a martyr on the night of his death looking through the narrow window to the sky and feeling that already he has the wings that shall bear him up" (she moved her hand dreamily over her face); "an epicurean discoursing at a Roman bath to a knot of his disciples on the nature of happiness; a Kaffir witch doctor seeking for herbs by moonlight, while from the huts on the hillside come the sound of dogs barking and the voices of women and children; a mother giving bread and milk to her children in little wooden basins and singing the evening song. I like to see it all. I feel it run through me. That life belongs to me. It makes my little life large. It breaks down the narrow walls that shut me in."

She sighed and drew a long breath. "Have you made any plan?" she asked him presently.

"Yes," he said, the words coming in jets, with pauses between; "I will take the gray mare. I will travel first. I will see the world. Then I will find work."

"What work?"

"I do not know."

She made a little impatient movement.

"That is no plan—travel, see the world, find work! If you go into the world aimless, without a definite object, dreaming, dreaming, you will be definitely defeated, bamboozled, knocked this way and that. In the end you will stand with your beautiful life all spent and nothing to show. They talk

of genius. It is nothing but this—that a man knows what he can do best and does it and nothing else. Waldo," she said, knitting her little fingers closer among his, "I wish I could help you. I wish I could make you see that you must decide what you will be and do. It does not matter what you choose. Be a farmer, business man, artist, what you will, but know your aim and live for that one thing. We have only one life. The secret of success is concentration. Wherever there has been a great life or a great work, that has gone before. Taste everything a little, look at everything a little, but live for one thing. Anything is possible to a man who knows his end and moves straight for it, and for it alone. I will show you what I mean," she said concisely. "Words are gas till you condense them into pictures."

"Suppose a woman, young, friendless as I am, the weakest thing on God's earth. But she must make her way through life. What she would be she cannot be because she is a woman, so she looks carefully at herself and the world about her to see where her path must be made. There is no one to help her. She must help herself. She looks. These things she has—a sweet voice, rich in subtle intonations; a fair, very fair face, with a power of concentrating in itself and giving expression to feelings that otherwise must have been dissipated in words; a rare power of entering into other lives unlike her own and intuitively reading them aright. These qualities she has. How shall she use them?"

"A poet, a writer, needs only the mental. What use has he for a beautiful body that registers clearly mental emotions? And the painter wants an eye for form and color, and the musician an ear for time and tune, and the mere drudge has no need for mental gifts. But there is one art in which all she has would be used, for which they are all necessary—the delicate, expressive body, the rich voice, the power of mental transposition. The actor, who absorbs and then reflects from himself other human lives, needs them all, but needs not much more. This is her end, but how to reach it? Before her are endless difficulties. Seas must be crossed, poverty must be endured, loneliness, want. She must be content to wait long before she can even get her feet upon the path. If she has made blunders in the past, if she has weighted herself with a burden which she must bear to the end, she must bear the burden bravely and labor on. There is no use in walling and repentance here. The next world is the place for that. This life is too short. By our errors we see deeper into life. They help us."

She waited for awhile. "If she does all this—if she waits patiently, if she is never cast down, never desponds, never forgets her end, moves straight toward it, bending men and things most unlikely to her purpose—she must succeed at last. Men and things are plastic. They part to the right and left when one comes among them moving in a straight line to one end. I know it by my own little experience," she said. "Long years ago I resolved to be sent to school. It seemed a thing utterly out of my power, but I waited. I watched. I collected clothes. I wrote, took my place at the school. When all was ready, I bore with my full force on the Boer woman, and she sent me at last. It was a small thing, but life is made up of small things, as body is built up of cells. What has been done in small things can be done in large.

shall be," she said softly. Waldo listened. To him the words were no confession, no glimpse into the strong, proud, restless heart of the woman. They were general words with a general application. He looked up into the sparkling sky with wild eyes.

"Yes," he said; "but when we lie and think and think we see that there is nothing worth doing. The universe is so large, and man is so small."

She shook her head quickly.

"But we must not think so far. It is madness. It is a disease. We know that no man's work is great and stands forever. Moses is dead and the prophets, and the books that our grandmothers read on the mold is eating. Your poet and painter and actor—before the shouts that applaud them have died their names grow strange; they are milestones that the world has passed. Men have set their mark on mankind forever, as they thought, but time has washed it out as it has washed out mountains and continents." She raised herself on her elbow. "And what if we could help mankind and leave the traces of our work upon it to the end? Mankind is only an ephemeral blossom on the tree of time. There were others before it opened; there will be others after it has fallen. Where was the man in the time of the dicyonod and when hoary monsters wallowed in the mud? Will he be found in the eons that are to come? We are sparks, we are sunbeams, we are poles, what we are dying already. It is all a dream."

"I know that thought. When the fever of living is on us, when the desire to become, to know, to do, is driving us mad, we can use it as an antidote: to still the fever and cool our beating pulses. But it is a poison, not a food. If we live on it, it will turn our blood to ice. We might as well be dead. We must not, Waldo. I want your life to be beautiful, to end in something. You are nobler and stronger than I," she said, "and as much better as one of God's great angels is better than a sinning man. Your life must go for something."

"Yes; we will work," he said.

She moved closer to him and lay still, his black curls touching her smooth little head.

Doss, who had laid at his master's side, climbed over the bench and curled himself up in her lap. She drew her skirt up over him, and the three sat motionless for a long time.

"Waldo," she said suddenly, "they are laughing at us."

"Who?" he asked, starting up.

"The stars," she said softly.

"Do you not see? There is a little, white, mocking finger pointing down at us from each one of them! We are talking of tomorrow and tomorrow, and our hearts are so strong; we are not thinking of something that can touch us softly in the dark and make us still forever. They are laughing at us, Waldo."

Both sat looking upward.

"Do you ever pray?" he asked her in a low voice.

"I never do, but I might when I look up there. I will tell you," he added, in a still lower voice, "where I could pray. If there were a wall of rock on the edge of a world, and one rock stretched out far, far into space, and I stood alone upon it, alone, with stars above me and stars below me—I would not say anything, but the feeling would be prayer."

"There was an end to their conversation after that, and Doss fell asleep on her knee. At last the night wind grew very chilly.

"Ah," she said, shivering, and drawing the skirt about her shoulders, "I am cold. Inspan the horses, and call me when you are ready."

She slipped down and walked toward the house, Doss stiffly following her, not pleased at being roused. At the door she met Gregory.

"I have been looking for you every where; may I not drive you home?" he said.

"Waldo drives me," she replied, passing on, and it appeared to Gregory that she looked at him in the old way, without seeing him. But before she had reached the door an idea had occurred to her, for she turned.

"If you wish to drive me, you may," Gregory went to look for Em, whom he found pouring out coffee in the back room. He put his hand quickly on her shoulder.

"You must ride with Waldo; I am going to drive your cousin home."

"But I can't come just now, Greg. I promised Tant' Sannie Muller to look after the things while she went to rest a little."

"Well, you can come presently, can't you? I didn't say you were to come now. I'm sick of this thing," said Gregory, turning sharply on his heel.

"Why must I sit up the whole night because your stepmother chooses to get married?"

"Oh, it's all right, Greg. I only meant—"

But he did not hear her, and a man had come up to have his cup filled. An hour after Waldo came in to look for her and found her still busy at the table.

"The horses are ready," he said, "but if you would like to have one dance more I will wait."

She shook her head wearily.

"No, I am quite ready. I want to go."

And soon they were on the sandy road the buggy had traveled an hour before. Their horses, with heads close together, nodding sleepily as they walked in the starlight, you might have counted the rise and fall of their feet in the sand, and Waldo in his saddle nodded drowsily also. Only Em was awake, and watched the starlight road with wide open eyes. At last she spoke.

"I wonder if all people feel so old, so very old, when they get to be 17?"

"Not older than before," said Waldo, sleepily, pulling at his bridle.

INSOMNIA

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Presently she said again:

"I wish I could have been a little child always. You are good then. You are never selfish. You like every one to have everything, but when you are grown up there are some things you like to have all to yourself. You don't like any one else to have any of them."

"Yes," said Waldo sleepily, and she did not speak again.

When they reached the farmhouse, all was dark, for Lyndall had retired as soon as they got home.

Waldo lifted Em from the saddle, and for a moment she leaned her head on his shoulder and clung to him.

"You are very tired," he said as he walked with her to the door. "Let me go in and light a candle for you."

"No, thank you; it is all right," she said. "Good night, Waldo, dear."

But when she went in she sat long alone in the dark.

CHAPTER XX.

WALDO GOES OUT TO TASTE LIFE, AND EM STAYS AT HOME AND TASTES IT.

At 9 o'clock in the evening, packing his bundles for the next morning's start, Waldo looked up and was surprised to see Em's yellow head peeping in at his door. It was many a month since she had been there. She said she had made him sandwiches for his journey, and she staid awhile to help him put his goods into the saddle-bags.

"You can leave the old things lying about," she said. "I will lock the room and keep it waiting for you to come back some day."

To come back some day! Would the bird ever return to its cage? But he thanked her. When she went away, he stood on the doorstep holding the candle till she had almost reached the door. But she was not coming in, no hurry to enter and find out of going in at the back door, walked with long, light footsteps round the low brick wall that ran before the house. Opposite the open window of the parlor she stopped. The little room, kept carefully closed in Tant' Sannie's time, was well lighted by a paraffin lamp; books and work lay strewn about it, and it was a bright, habitable aspect. Beside the lamp at the table in the corner sat Lyndall, the open letters and papers of the day's post lying scattered before her, while she perused the columns of a newspaper. At the center table, with his arms folded on an open paper, which there was not light enough to read, sat Gregory. He was looking at her. The light from the open window fell on Em's face under its white "kajpe" as she looked in, but no one glanced that way.

"Go and fetch me a glass of water," Lyndall said at last.

Gregory went out to find it. When he put it down at her side, she merely moved her head in recognition, and he went back to his seat and his occupation. Then Em moved slowly away from the window, and through it came in spotted, hard winged insects, to play round the lamp, till, one by one, they stuck to its glass and fell to the foot dead.

Ten o'clock struck. Then Lyndall rose, gathered up her papers and letters and wished Gregory good night. Some time after Em entered. She had been sitting all the while on the loft ladder and had drawn her "kajpe" down very much over her face.

Gregory was piecing together the bits of an envelope when she came in.

"I thought you were never coming," he said, turning round quickly and throwing the fragments on to the floor. "You know I have been hearing all day, and it is 10 o'clock already."

"I'm sorry. I did not think you would be going so soon," she said in a low voice.

"I can't hear what you say. What makes you stumble so? Well, good night, Em."

He stooped down hastily to kiss her. "I want to talk to you, Gregory."

"Well, make haste," he said pettishly. "I'm awfully tired. I've been sitting here all the evening. Why couldn't you come and talk before?"

"I will not keep you long," he answered very steadily now. "I think, Gregory, it would be better if you and I were never to be married."

"Good heavens! Em, what do you mean? I thought you were so fond of me? You always professed to be. What on earth have you taken into your head now?"

"I think it would be better," she said, folding her hands over each other, very much as though she were praying.

"Better, Em! What do you mean? Even a woman can't take a freak all about nothing! You must have some reason for it, and I'm sure I've done nothing to offend you. I wrote only today to my sister to tell her to come up next month to our wedding, and I've been as affectionate and happy as possible. Come, what's the matter?"

He put his arm half round her shoulder very loosely.

"I think it would be better," she answered slowly.

"Oh, well," he said, drawing himself up, "if you won't enter into explanations you won't, and I'm not the man to beg and pray—not to any woman, and you know that! If you don't want to marry me I can't oblige you to, of course."

She stood quite still before him.

"You women never do know your own minds two days together, and of course you know the state of your own feelings best, but it's very strange. Have you really made up your mind, Em?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm very sorry. I'm sure I've not been in anything to blame. A man can't always be billing and cooing; but, as you say, if your feeling for me has changed, it's much better you should not marry me. There's nothing so foolish as to marry some one you don't love, and I only wish for your happiness, I'm sure. I dare say you'll find some one can make you much happier than I could. The first person we love, is seldom the right one. You are very young. It's quite natural you should change."

She said nothing.

"Things often seem hard at the time, but Providence makes them turn out for the best in the end," said Gregory. "You'll let me kiss you, Em, just for old friendship's sake." He stooped down. "You must look upon me as a dear brother, as a cousin at least. As long as I am on the farm I shall always be glad to help you, Em."

Soon after the brown pony was cantering along the footpath to the daub and wattle house, and his master as he rode whistled "John Sperwig" and the "Thorn Kloof Schottische."

The sun had not yet touched the outstretched arms of the prickly pear upon the "kopje," and the early cocks and hens still strutted about stiffly after the night's roost, when Waldo stood before the wagon house saddling the gray mare. Every now and then he glanced up at the old familiar objects. They had a new aspect that morning. Even the cocks, seen in the light of parting, had a peculiar interest, and he listened with conscious attention while one crowed clear and loud as it stood on the pigsty wall. He wished good morning softly to the Kaffir woman who was coming up from the huts to light the fire. He was leaving them all to that old life and from his high he looked down on them pityingly. So they would keep on crowing and coming to light fires, when for him that old colorless existence was but a dream.

He went into the house to say good-bye to Em, and then he walked to the door of Lyndall's room to wake her, but she was up and standing in the doorway.

"So you are ready," she said.

Waldo looked at her with sudden heaviness; the exhilaration died out of his heart. Her gray dressing gown hung close about her and below its edge the little bare feet were resting on the threshold.

"I wonder when we shall meet again, Waldo? What you will be, and what I?"

"Will you write to me?" he asked of her.

"Yes, and if I should not, you can still remember, wherever you are, that you are not alone."

"Will you leave Doss for you," he said.

"No; I want you to have him. He loves you better than he loves me."

"Thank you." They stood quiet.

"Good-bye!" she said, putting her little hand in his, and he turned away, but when he reached the door she called to him: "Come back. I want to kiss you." She drew his face down to hers and held it with both hands and kissed it on the forehead and mouth. "Good-bye, dear!"

When he looked back, the little figure with its beautiful eyes was standing in the doorway still.

CHAPTER XXL

THE "KOPJE."

"Good morning!"

Em, who was in the storeroom measuring the Kaffir's rations, looked up and saw her former lover standing before her and the sunshine. For some days after that evening on which he had ridden home whistling he had shunned her. She might wish to enter into explanations, and he (Gregory Rose) was not the man for that kind of thing. If a woman had once thrown him overboard, she must take the consequences and stand by them. When, however, she showed no inclination to revert to the past and shunned him more than he shunned her, Gregory softened.

"You must let me call you Em still and be like a brother to you till I go," he said, and Em thanked him so humbly that he wished she hadn't. It wasn't so easy after that to think himself an injured man.

On that morning he stood some time in the doorway switching his whip and moving rather restlessly from one leg to the other.

"I think I'll just take a walk up to the camps and see how your birds are getting on. Now Waldo's gone you've no one to see after things, Nice morning."

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ing, isn't it?" Then he added suddenly, "I'll just go round to the house and get a drink of water first," and somewhat awkwardly walked off. He might have found water in the kitchen, but he never glanced toward the buckets.

In the front room a monkey and two tumblers stood on the center table, but he merely looked round, peeped into the parlor, looked round again, and then walked out at the front door and found himself again at the storeroom without having satisfied his thirst. "Awfully nice morning this," he said, trying to pose himself in a graceful and indifferent attitude against the door. "It isn't hot, and it isn't cold. It's awfully nice."

"Yes," said Em.

"Your cousin, now," said Gregory in an aimless sort of way—"I suppose she's shut up in her room writing letters."

"No," said Em.

"Gone for a drive, I expect? Nice morning for a drive."

"No."

"Gone to see the ostriches, I suppose?"

"No." After a little silence Em added, "I saw her go by the kraals to the 'kopje.'"

Gregory crossed and uncrossed his legs.

"Well, I think I'll just go and have a look about," he said, "and see how things are getting on before I go to the camps. Good-bye. So long."

Em left for awhile the bags she was folding and went to the window, the same through which, years before, Bonaparte had watched the slouching figure cross the yard. Gregory walked to the pigsty first and contemplated the pigs for a few seconds, then turned round and stood looking fixedly at the wall of the fuel house as though he thought it wanted repairing. Then he started off suddenly, with the evident intention of going to the ostrich camps, then paused, hesitated, and finally walked off in the direction of the "kopje."

Then Em went back to the corner and folded more sacks.

On the other side of the "kopje" Gregory caught sight of a white tail waving among the stones, and a succession of short, frantic barks told where Doss was engaged in bowling imploringly to a lizard who had crept between two stones and who had not the slightest intention of resuming himself at that particular moment.

The dog's mistress sat higher up, under the shelving rock, her face bent over a volume of plays upon her knee. As Gregory mounted the stones she started violently and looked up, then resumed her book.

"I hope I am not troubling you," said Gregory as he reached her side. "If I am, I will go away. I just—"

"No; you may stay."

"I fear I startled you."

"Yes; your step was firmer than it generally is. I thought it was that of some one else."

"Who could it be but me?" asked Gregory, seating himself on a stone at her feet.

"Do you suppose you are the only man who would find anything to attract him to this 'kopje'?"

(Continued next week.)

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He will be a mighty monopolist, a confidence man or something else. At present he is a trifle shorter than a yardstick and has a face like a cherub. This little rascal stood at the front door of a Second Avenue residence, a snow shovel in one hand and a broom in the other.

"Walk cleaned, mum?" he asked briskly. "Clean it fur a dime."

"This is a very narrow lot, bubby. I never pay but a nickel."

"That's what the lady next door said, that you'd beat me down to a nickel. She said you was closer'n the cover on a baseball."

"She did, hey? I'll show her. She's so stingy that she works her potato parings into hash. Close, am I? How much did she pay you?"

"Fifteen cents, mum."

"I pay you a quarter. When you're come in and have a warm, piece of mince pie. Poor little fellow!"

The programme was carried out to the letter, and the little boy with big blue eyes, fair face and golden hair went whistling down the street. When the two women faced each other over the line fence, they glared. "Told a mere baby that I was mean and would rob him, did you?" began the woman who had furnished the pie.

"I told him nothing. What did you mean by advising him to make a bargain with me first or I'd only pay him 2 cents and to look out that I didn't give him a plugged coin?"

"Why, I never did. He went to your house first. Did you ever see or hear of such an angelic looking little villain?" and they talked the whole matter over. Two maternal strong right hands are itching for that cherub to show up again.—Detroit Free Press.

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