

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

BY OLIVE SCHREINER

A TALE OF LIFE IN THE BOER REPUBLIC.

(Continued from last week.)

She was not being retained in her present position against her will and was not a little relieved when she sat up and held out her hand for the shawl.

"I must go," she said. The stranger wrapped the shawl very carefully about her.

"Keep it close around your face, Lyndall. It is very damp outside. Shall I walk with you to the house?"

"No. Lie down and rest. I will come and wake you at 3 o'clock." She lifted her face that he might kiss it, and when he had kissed it once she still held it that he might kiss it again.

"Have you forgotten anything?" "No." She gave one long, lingering look at the old room. When she was gone and the door shut, the stranger filled his glass and sat at the table sipping it thoughtfully.

The night outside was misty and damp. The faint moonlight, trying to force its way through the thick air, made darkly visible the outlines of the buildings. The stones and walls were moist, and now and then a drop, slowly collecting, fell from the eaves to the ground.

Gregory rose was in the left putting it neat. Outside the rain poured. A six months' drought had broken, and the thirsty plain was drenched with water.

CHAPTER XXIII. GREGORY ROSE HAS AN IDEA. Gregory Rose was in the left putting it neat. Outside the rain poured.

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He seemed lost in consideration. Then he said: "It is better to have you on those conditions than not at all. If you will have it, let it be so."

He sat looking at her. On her face was the weary look that rested there so often now when she sat alone. Two months had not passed since they parted, but the time had set its mark on her.

From under their half closed lids the keen eyes looked down at her. Her shoulders were bent. For a moment the little figure had forgotten its queenly bearing and drooped wearily.

It certainly was not in her power to resist him nor any strength in her that made his own at that moment grow soft as he looked at her.

He touched one little hand that rested on her knee. "Poor little thing!" he said. "You are only a child."

She looked into his eyes as a little child might whom a long day's play had saddened. He lifted her gently up and sat her on his knee.

She turned her face to his shoulder and buried it against his neck. He wound his strong arm about her and held her close to him. When she had sat for a long while, he drew with his hand the face down and held it against his arm.

They sat quite still, excepting that only sometimes he raised her fingers softly to his mouth.

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He could feel that she shook her head. "Do you want to be quiet now?" "Yes."

They sat quite still, excepting that only sometimes he raised her fingers softly to his mouth.

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HEADACHE

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choly crowd—in and about the wagon house, and the solitary gander, who alone had survived the six months' want of water, walked hither and thither, printing his webbed footmarks on the mud, to have them washed out the next instant by the pelting rain.

Gregory was working in the loft took no notice of it beyond stuffing a sack into the broken pane to keep it out, and, in spite of the pelt and patter, one's clear "Do not remove it. I need one to help me. Just stay on." And she had added: "You must not remain in your own little house. Live with me. You can look after my ostriches better so."

And Gregory did not think her. What difference did it make to him, paying rent or not, living there or not? It was all one. But yet he came. Em wished that he would still sometimes talk of the strength and master right of man, but Gregory was as one smitten on the cheek bone. She might do what she pleased, he would find no fault, had no word to say. He had forgotten that it is man's right to rule. On that rainy morning he had lighted his pipe at the kitchen fire and when breakfast was over stood in the front door watching the water rush down the road till the pipe dried out in his mouth.

Em saw she must do something for him and found him a large calico duster. He had sometimes talked of putting the loft neat, and today she could find nothing else for him to do. So she had the ladder put to the trapdoor that he need not go out in the wet, and Gregory with the broom and duster mounted to the loft. Once at work, he worked hard. He dusted down the very rafters and cleaned the broken candle molds and bent forks that had stuck in the thatch for 20 years.

He seated himself on the packing case which had once held Waldie's books and proceeded to examine the contents of another which he had not yet looked at. It was carelessly nalled down. He loosened one plank and began to lift out various articles of female attire—old fashioned caps, aprons, dresses with long pointed bodices such as he remembered to have seen his mother wear when he was a little child. He shook them out carefully to see there were no moths and then sat down to fold them up again one by one. They had belonged to Em's mother, and the box as packed at her death had stood untouched and forgotten these long years. She must have been a tall woman, that mother of Em's, for when he stood up to shake out a dress the neck was on a level with his, and the skirt touched the ground. Gregory laid a nightcap out on his knee and began rolling up the strings, but presently his fingers moved slower and slower, then his chin rested on his breast, and finally the imploring blue eyes were fixed on the frill abstractedly.

When Em's voice called to him from the foot of the ladder, he started and threw the nightcap behind him. She was only come to tell him that his cup of soup was ready, and when he could hear that she was gone he picked up the nightcap again and a great brown sun "kapje," just such a "kapje" and such a dress as one of those he remembered to have seen a Sister of Mercy wear. Gregory's mind was very full of thought. He took down a fragment of an old looking glass from behind a beam and put the "kapje" on. His beard looked somewhat grotesque under it. He put up his hand to hide it. That was better. The blue eyes looked out with mild gentleness that became eyes looking out from under a "kapje." Next he took the brown dress and, looking round furtively, slipped it over his head. He had just got his arms in the sleeves and was trying to hook up the back when an increase in the patter of the rain at the window made him drag it off hastily. When he perceived there was no one coming, he tumbled the things back into the box and, covering it carefully, went down the ladder.

Em was still at her work, trying to adjust a new needle in the machine. Gregory drank his soup and then sat before her, an awful and mysterious look in his eyes.

"I am going to town tomorrow," he said. "I'm almost afraid you won't be able to go," said Em, who was intent on her needle. "I don't think it is going to leave off today."

"I am going," said Gregory. Em looked up. "But the 'sloots' are as full as rivers. You cannot go. We can wait for the post," she said. "I am not going for the post," said Gregory impressively. Em looked for explanation. None came.

"When will you be back?" "I am not coming back." "Are you going to your friends?" Gregory waited, then caught her by the wrist. "Look here, Em," he said between his teeth. "I can't stand it any more. I am going to her."

ly, casting its amber glow over Em's light hair and black dress, with the ruffie of crape about the neck and over the white curls of the sheepskin on which she sat.

"Where the reeds dance by the river, Where the willow's song is said, On the face of the morning water, Is reflected a white flower's head."

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CHAPTER XXIV. AN UNFINISHED LETTER. Gregory Rose had been gone seven months. Em sat alone on a white sheepskin before the fire.

The August wind, weird and shrill, howled round the chimneys and through the crannies and in walls and doors and uttered a long, low cry as it forced its way among the clefts of the stonework on the "kopje." It was a wild night. The prickly pear tree, stiff and upright as it held its arms, felt the wind's might and knocked its fat leaves heavily together till great branches broke off. The Kafirs as they slept in their straw huts whistled one to another that before morning there would not be an armful of thatch left on the roofs, and the beams of the wagon house creaked and groaned as if it were heavy work to resist the impetuosity of the wind.

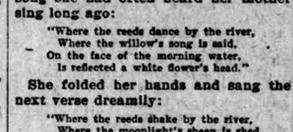
Em had not gone to bed. Who could sleep on a night like this? So in the dining room she had lighted a fire and sat on the ground before it, turning the roaster cakes that lay on the coals to bake. It would save work in the morning, and she blew out the light because the wind through the window chinks made it flicker and run, and she sat singing to herself as she watched the cakes. They lay at one end of the wide hearth on a bed of coals, and at the other end a fire burned up steadily.

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