

Dream Life and Real Life

Dream Life and Real Life by Olive Schreiner is a philosophical novel that explores the inner conflicts and contrasts between idealistic dreams and harsh reality, delving into the emotional and psychological struggles of its protagonist as she seeks meaning and fulfillment in her life.



I. Dream Life and Real Life; A Little African Story

Little Jannita, tasked with herding Angora goats on a vast, barren plain, seeks solace under a milk-bush, succumbing to sleep and dreams. In her vivid dreamscape, the mundane harshness of her life with the Boers transforms into a world of gentleness and appreciation, a stark contrast to her reality where gratitude and kindness are sparing. Her dream extends to a poignant reunion with her father, intertwining fantasies of return to a Denmark remembered or imagined, where pain and privation do not exist.

Her waking life intrudes through a theft witnessed in her slumber; a Hottentot, observing her vulnerability, steals a goat, betraying the trust inherent in their shared, yet separate existences on the plain. This theft, a tangible representation of the ongoing afflictions in her life, leads Jannita into a confrontation with her harsh reality: a lie told in fear, leading to punishment without supper, embodying the Boer's hard, uncompromising justice.

Amid her punishment and hunger, Jannita finds a moment of escape, a fleeting connection with a wild springbok, representing freedom and unattainable desires. This encounter emboldens her, and she ventures into the night, away from her life of

servitude toward an uncertain freedom. The narrative traces her journey of self-reliance, survival, and discovery of a hidden refuge among the rocks—a sanctuary she claims as her own, illustrating her transition from captivity to the autonomy of the wild.

However, peace is transient. Eavesdropping on a sinister plot by the Hottentot, Dirk, a Bushman, and an English navy, Jannita learns of a planned attack on her former abode. Her resolve strengthens; she risks her newfound sanctuary to warn the farm, embodying a heroism born of desperation and innate goodness.

The closing passages juxtapose the tranquility of her makeshift home against the tempest of her emotions and the external turmoil of a brewing storm. Jannita's fleeting moments of delight in nature's embrace and her imaginative reveries are shattered by the looming violence. Despite her efforts, confronting the reality of her limitations, she is powerless to intervene directly in the impending doom that shadows her past and current worlds. The narrative leaves her in a liminal space, between the dream of what could be and the harsh truth of what is, encapsulating the essence of childhood innocence adrift in the harsh landscapes of both dream and real life.

II. THE WOMAN'S ROSE

Within an old, brown carved box tied with string, the storyteller harbors tokens of the past, among them a singular rose. This rose, distinct from other mementos and preserved for twelve years, embodies the promise of spring and renewal amidst personal desolation and doubt. It stands as a testament to enduring faith in womanhood when faced with despair, its aroma reviving memories of resilience.

In contrast to other forgotten floral keepsakes, like the white acacia flowers once imbued with a summer's day memory but eventually discarded, the rose remains. It hails from a youthful episode in a small, isolated town, predominantly male, where the narrator, a lively girl of fifteen, visited. Upon arrival, she observes the singular adoration bestowed upon a young woman by the local men, a fascination rooted partly in noble devotion, partly in a natural inclination for singular affection in confinement, and partly in petty jealousy.

The young woman, then the sole object of male attention, finds herself sidelined upon the narrator's entrance. The men's affections swiftly transfer to the newcomer, intrigued by her novelty. Despite enjoying the newfound adoration, the narrator is troubled by the shift, admiring the original belle for her serene beauty and character, disheartened by the division it causes.

A turning point arrives with a party honoring the narrator's departure, highlighting the community's transient allegiances. In a striking act of kindness and perhaps reconciliation, the young woman, initially set to wear a rare white rose—a token of her stature—instead chooses to adorn the narrator's hair with it. This gesture, transcending silent rivalries and unspoken tensions, marks a moment of mutual recognition and unspoken connection between the two women. The act transforms the rose into a symbol of shared womanhood, complexity, and the unspoken bonds that can emerge from rivalry and empathy alike.

III. "THE POLICY IN FAVOUR OF PROTECTION"

In a cozy room illuminated by the warmth of a bright fire, a woman engrossed in her writing is interrupted by a visitor, a young woman consumed by a poignant tale of unrequited love for a celebrated writer, known to both women. The young woman, elegantly dressed and visibly distressed, implores the older woman for intervention, believing her the sole beacon of hope capable of bridging her affections to the man who remains oblivious to her desire. The narrative unfolds as a deeply moving exploration of the complexities of love, revealing the younger woman's desperation and the older woman's contemplation of the profound implications of influencing such delicate matters.

The older woman, a symbol of strength, wisdom, and empathy, engages in a heartfelt dialogue that peels back the layers of romanticized love to question its depth, its endurance, and its compatibility with the raw realities of life together. Her reflections reveal a seasoned understanding of love's power and pitfalls, challenging the younger woman to consider the gravity of her feelings and the future they might entail.

As the story progresses, the older woman faces a silent torment of her own, reflected in the agonizing decision to distance herself from the man at the center of the young woman's affections—a decision that bears the weight of her unvoiced sacrifices and untold stories. Through this act of self-denial, she embodies a profound selflessness, prioritizing the young woman's happiness over her own unspoken desires.

The narrative climaxes with the young woman's return, heartbroken over the news of the man's marriage to another. In their final exchange, the older woman offers solace, wisdom, and a perspective that seeks to transcend personal tragedy by finding purpose in the welfare of others. This enlightened viewpoint, emphasizing generosity, compassion, and the enduring capacity for growth and healing, closes the chapter on a

note of somber yet dignified resolution.

"Dream Life and Real Life" thus weaves a poignant tapestry of human emotions, illuminating the depths of despair and the peaks of selfless love. It is a stark meditation on the intricacies of the human heart, underscored by the timeless truths that bind us in our shared experience of love, loss, and the indomitable strength of the female spirit.

