



# Alfred and Emily

*Doris Lessing*

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## Alfred and Emily Doris Lessing

I think my father's rage at the trenches took me over, when I was very young, and has never left me. Do children feel their parents' emotions? Yes, we do, and it is a legacy I could have done without. What is the use of it? It is as if that old war is in my own memory, my own consciousness.

In this extraordinary book, the 2007 Nobel Laureate Doris Lessing explores the lives of her parents, each irrevocably damaged by the Great War. Her father wanted the simple life of an English farmer, but shrapnel almost killed him in the trenches, and thereafter he had to wear a wooden leg. Her mother, Emily, spent the war nursing the wounded in the Royal Free Hospital after her great love, a doctor, drowned in the Channel.

In the fictional first half of *Alfred and Emily*, Doris Lessing imagines the happier lives her parents might have made for themselves had there been no war; a story that begins with their meeting at a village cricket match outside Colchester. This is followed by a piercing examination of their relationship as it actually was in the shadow of the Great War, of the family's move to Africa, and of the impact of her parents' marriage on a young woman growing up in a strange land.

"Here I still am," says Doris Lessing, "trying to get out from under that monstrous legacy, trying to get free." Triumphant, with the publication of *Alfred and Emily*, she has done just that.

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