

**Free Sample Chapter**

A couple stands on a stone bridge over a stream in a rural landscape. The man is wearing a brown jacket and a red beanie, and the woman is wearing a green jacket. They are looking out over a green field towards a stone building in the distance. The sky is filled with large, grey clouds, and a small airplane is visible in the upper right. The title 'NATIVE SOIL' is overlaid in large, black, serif font.

**NATIVE  
SOIL**

Sarah Watkinson

# 1

## The Man with a Mission



‘Will the audience be very eminent? These days I feel so stupid and out of touch.’

‘They’ll be about ten thousand GCSE biology kids. I said we can always slip out.’

Twenty minutes later they stood in the hurtling Cromwell Road under the cliff-face frontage of the Natural History Museum. Olivia paid the taxi driver.

‘That was a luxury,’ said Pippa. ‘I like it when my rich friends come to town. Thanks, Liv.’

When you’ve had your first expensive but easily disarranged haircut for fifteen months, and your feet, jammed into unaccustomed heels, cannot handle a brisk dodge across traffic, a cab is hardly a luxury. And anyhow, Olivia had little to spend on lately, alone in the wilds. Steadying herself on the pavement as the taxi vanished, she glanced up at what could be seen of the sky, to counter that nervy, hemmed-in feeling London gave her. She hoped she wasn’t tired of life. There had been no cars in

Dr. Johnson's day, only lovely horses. Apes and serpents watched quietly from their stone niches in the museum's gothic arcading. What a comforting assertion by those old naturalists—that Nature deserved a cathedral in the Empire's capital. Arm-in-arm the friends dodged between four jockeying lanes of traffic and up the grand steps to the entrance.

Inside, the halls pullulated with school parties. Some were in uniformed crocodiles carrying notebooks, a teacher front and rear, others milled in clusters in a rainbow of anoraks and trainers. Teachers marshalled their groups to coalesce round the tapir, study dioramas or jostle into queues for the lavatories, or the gift shop's pocket money objects. They fingered science-fiction plastic dinosaurs, these little inheritors of mammalian supremacy, each child about the size of one of the *Diplodocus*'s vertebrae.

Olivia's parents had brought her here at weekends during the divorce, a diversion for their tug-of-love daughter. She hated the mausoleum atmosphere of the cavernous atrium. She imagined all the life that had ended in these cold glass cases: the fluttering and swooping, courting and nest-building, preening and grooming, barking and carolling; all the migrations and flockings and dawn choruses stilled in mothballed corpses.

'There's Andy! And Mark too,' Pippa waved both arms, regardless of a stare from a volunteer museum assistant in a uniform red sweatshirt. Andrew Bamberg and Pippa's husband Mark walked towards them from a cloistered side corridor, signed as the way to the lecture theatre. Mark waved back—a little shorter and tweedier than Andrew, the rural GP up on a day in town. Both men smiled.

Andrew Bamberg—in person—put out a hand. 'Mrs. Gabrieli? Thank you so much for coming to my lecture. I'm afraid you must have been press-ganged.'

He had a lean face, just like on TV, cleanshaven but with a shadow, mobile and humorous, deep-set dark eyes and a wiry frame, set off today by his lecturing get-up. He appeared smoother than the anoracked figure of *Invisible Wildlife*. A hand-made suit

and white shirt, no tie. Ridiculous, how school-girlish one could become, faced with a celebrity. It was like the opposite of seeing a ghost; a living, breathing human version of the flickering TV presence that kept her company—kept her sane—in her dark and lonely farmhouse. Good God, she was blushing. She was out of practice, that was it. Normal, if one had been so long out of circulation.

‘Olivia’s going to put up a satellite dish on her farm,’ said Pippa, sprightly. ‘You were very blurry up there, Andy.’

Andrew smiled, looking at Olivia. ‘I hear you’re Isobel Burbank’s daughter? Do you play too?’

People never understood how you wouldn’t dream of competing with a virtuoso mother like Isobel.

‘So you and Pippa were little girls together!’ Andrew surveyed Olivia and Pippa, amused as though picturing them as children. He might have been making friends with a couple of badger cubs, thought Olivia. So much for the haircut and heels. What had Pippa and Mark said about her? Of course, decent clothes and clean shoes were normal for media people; Andrew Bamberg would look silly mucking out. Now he was glancing at his watch, offering her a faux-apologetic smile. ‘Look, I have to go and get organised. You’ll have to excuse me. Why don’t we lunch afterwards?’

‘See you then, Andy. Good luck,’ said Mark, and patted Andrew on the shoulder.

‘I may need it.’ And he was off, down the gothic corridor, into the recesses of the building.

Mark escorted them in the other direction to the public entrance of the lecture theatre. He foiled Pippa’s attempt to slide into the back row and steered the three of them into the front, as cheerleaders, he said. Olivia felt old as the noise of teenagers swelled behind them.

‘It’s summat about spaceships,’ a youth behind them told his neighbour.

‘No it i’n’t. It’s about bacteria.’

‘Oh nooo! Bor-ing.’

‘I know, the panda tickets were sold out,’ said the young teacher appeasingly.

‘Andy’s got a hard row to hoe,’ whispered Mark. ‘None of them will be the least bit interested in microbes.’

Andrew started strongly with a rapid montage of repellent instances of disease and decay. There was good feedback, cries of ‘Yuck!’ ‘Ugh!’ ‘Gross!’, and vomiting noises. Two boys hit each other. A lavishly made-up girl ran out dramatically, hands over her mouth.

Without waiting for the hubbub to abate Andrew dimmed the lights and played false-colour videos of spectacular microbes: a space-age spirochaete in motion and Vorticellas extending and retracting their vaguely sexual trumpets.

‘Wow! Unreal!’

Lights up. He addressed a girl directly. ‘What’s odd with this?’

The others watched. He showed the revolving sphere of spaceship Earth, a monochrome version of the iconic image.

‘It’s black!’

‘Yes—before bacteria made us an atmosphere, the sea was black. Sulphides.’

‘Is that true?’ Olivia whispered to Mark. She imagined the horror of a black horizon, grey waves, sulphurous air, like *Paradise Lost*. Mark nodded.

Andrew glanced at them. ‘Yes—the sea would have been black. And nothing could survive but bacteria. There was no oxygen.’

‘Amazing,’ Olivia, spoke out loud. Then caught Andrew’s eyes on her and blushed.

Again.

Behind her, the audience fell silent.

‘Yes, isn’t it?’ he was addressing her, but loud enough for the audience to hear. ‘Bacteria do amazing chemistry. Bacteria got the oxygen out of rocks and into the atmosphere. And now plants keep it circulating. That’s why we can breathe.’ He changed to modern green-and-blue Earth and zoomed on Siberia.

‘This is all forest—where’s this?’

‘America!’ A confident boy’s voice from the back.

He zoomed in further to show inset trees. ‘This is the world we live in. You see the trees. But the vital part is out of sight, underground. Without soil bugs—no plants, no trees, no animals.’

‘But moss grows without soil,’ said Olivia, swept up in the debate. Then blushed again.

‘It’s Nicole Kidman,’ somebody whispered loudly at the back. The dialogue at the front had become part of the show.

‘That’s true, Miss Kidman. But not many plants do that. You’ll know that from your own country.’

Mark gave a snort. Pippa nudged him.

‘She’s Australian,’ the audience whispered. There was shuffling as the ones at the back craned for a better view of Olivia.

There was dead silence when Andrew replied. ‘Without soil microbes, dead stuff would just pile up. Microbes run all those cycles you learn about at school: carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus. They’re microbial chemistry.’

Conversation about Miss Kidman broke out in the lecture theatre. ‘They’re going out.’

‘It’s a film.’

‘We’re in a film.’

‘Like *Moulin Rouge!*’

‘That’s the camera.’ A child pointed to the data projector.

‘Like *The Hours.*’

‘I thought she had red hair.’

‘Ain’t yer ever ‘eard o’ wigs?’

‘Miss Kidman,’ called a boy, ‘Miss Kidman, tell us about microbes!’

‘Gee, however do you guys find anything so teeny out there?’ asked Olivia, trying for the accent. ‘You can’t put a darn great tree under a microscope.’

‘Ah,’ said Andrew. All eyes were on the exchange. ‘That’s what I was coming to. DNA.’

He put up slides with cartoon naturalists using nets, hides, cameras and binoculars. ‘That’s how the people who built this museum discovered the variety of plants and animals all over the world. And that’s why they built this place, the variety of life was so stunning. But for microbes you need something different.’

A composite photo of a room-filling machine, a DNA model and a smiling white-coated girl in charge of a lab. ‘We have the technology. And there are far more bugs out there than plants or animals, billions of kinds, too many to count. It’s a new frontier. You just have to think small.’

At the end Andrew showed his credits—photos of his lab and researchers with their names. It was the cue for thanks from a teacher.

Mark stood. ‘Cut. It’s a wrap. We’d appreciate it if you could leave as quietly as possible by the door at the rear.’

Excited whispers ran through the school parties as they recognised the authority of the director. Everybody, including two teachers, filed out discreetly, stealing side-glances at Olivia.

It was wonderfully quiet in the staff dining room.

‘I love that picture of the earth from space,’ said Mark. ‘Never thought of it all run by bugs, I must say. Always thought bugs were bad news.’

‘It’s quite a statement, isn’t it—microbes rule the world?’ Andrew admitted. ‘But people are finding huge DNA diversity in the tiny stuff. It does look as though there are billions of unknown organisms, especially in soil and water. Another few years and we’ll have the technology to monitor what they’re actually doing in natural environments—if there’s any natural environment left.’

‘There will be if Olivia has anything to do with it,’ Pippa said. ‘Olivia has heather moors and limestone pavements, and the most heavenly wood.’

They all looked at her. She felt strangely self-conscious. ‘What a lovely way to be described! As though I owned some idyllic kingdom.’

‘Well, it’s true,’ Pippa said. ‘The house needs work, but it’s a gorgeous, unspoiled place. And I’m beginning to think of you as a farmer. Although you don’t look the part today.’

‘You should see me with my post rammer.’

Their soup arrived. Mark and Pippa set to. Olivia caught Andrew’s eye as, shaking out his napkin, he surveyed her across the table. ‘Where do you farm? Moors sound northerly.’

‘Wharfedale, in the Yorkshire Dales. I haven’t been at it long.’

‘No, I didn’t think you could have been.’ He smiled. ‘I’ll be up north in a couple of weeks.’

‘Won’t your undergraduates be back?’ said Mark. ‘I thought you were tied down in term time.’

‘It’s a sweat but I can fit it in. I’m going to see a promising location. It’s important to do this public understanding stuff. And helps attract good students. Outreach, you know. My boss’s trying to stop me, though.’

‘Your TV boss?’ asked Olivia. ‘Who’s that?’

‘No, she’s lovely. I meant my university head of department. Not my favourite person. Excuse me, off the record, of course.’

‘That man is a menace,’ said Mark. ‘He’s trying to stop Andy doing his programme.’

Olivia was amazed. ‘Aren’t universities supposed to tell people about the interesting things they do? You’d think he would want to trade on your programme’s success.’

‘The university loves me! I get lots of kudos for public understanding of our work. But molecular biology takes more than kudos. Science needs cash—salaries, equipment, buildings. Government panels decide policy and who gets funded. Nigel’s the head of our little department and hell bent on making his name in crop biotech, so he wants us all collaborating with agribusiness. Making fortunes out of pesticides for barley barons. It’s a damn shame, and specially tough on the young ecology researchers—who need encouragement, not that sort of mindless contempt.’ In his passion, he had become quite unlike the genial host of *Invisible Wildlife*.



Later they stood by the cloakroom as Olivia waited to retrieve her overnight bag. Taking it from the attendant, she glanced at her watch. 'I've got to get to Mama's by five.' She kissed Pippa. 'Thanks, Pip. It's been lovely.'

Mark bent to kiss her too, and Andrew shook her hand for the second time. It was a bony, masculine hand that took hers in a capable grip. Their eyes met. 'I've so much enjoyed meeting you, Miss Kidman. Maybe we'll meet again? Safe home!'

Waving over her shoulder, she hurried across the hall, through the revolving door and down the steps.

Uncharacteristically, she tripped, and had to be fielded by an elderly man coming in the opposite direction. Hanging to the smooth Melton cloth of his sleeve for balance, stammering apologies, she tugged the heel of her shoe out of a gap between the stone steps of the museum. No need, in London, to introduce herself and exchange pleasantries as you would in Skipton; once she had regained her shoe and poise and thanked the stranger, he tipped his hat with kind formality and went briskly on. Descending into the street Olivia wondered why, today, she should feel so disoriented, as though newly arrived in an unknown city. The same old London, familiar streets, looked distanced, vivid, almost cinematic. She could still feel the touch of Andrew Bamberg's hand. It was almost as if he had teleported her into his magic world behind the television screen, like *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Her hero was a real person. And he had enjoyed meeting her, had said so in as many words. Hearing his amused baritone, she realised she was smiling.

'I've made up the divan for you in the drawing room,' said Isobel. 'I hope you don't mind, darling. I needed your room for an artist friend; he's doing a painting of Ben, from photographs. It's such a good likeness, I have to sit down and have a little cry in front of it. Do sort yourself out, darling, while I see to a bite of lunch for us.'

As Isobel disappeared into the kitchen at the back, Olivia headed upstairs to deposit her overnight case in the drawing room, but something—old habit, probably—led her up another floor to her childhood attic room. Turpentine mingled with, but could not disguise, the little room's scent of sorrow and old furnishings. Her bedroom, on exeat from boarding school after the divorce. Its noises took her back: the whistle-dribble of the cold-water header tank refilling; the drone of an aircraft descending to Heathrow. The little skylight was already almost dark. Thank God she wasn't supposed to sleep tonight in the narrow bed, now loomed over by a hideous rendition of Ben in Jack Vettriano style, wearing cricket whites and smirking. It was nothing like the Ben she liked to remember, her twin and ten-year-old accomplice. She backed out, clicking the door firmly shut. The drawing room smelt more as if living people had been there lately, a Sloane Square miasma of furniture wax, drains and recent cigarette smoke, mingled with Isobel's scent, *Amazone*. Extracting a small whole Wensleydale from her bag, Olivia returned to the kitchen, where her mother took down plates and glasses and received the cheese.

'Ooh, yum, thank you darling. Is it from your cows? You must tell me all about yourself and Yorkshire. We'll have a quick bite before I go and practise. Some nice people coming for drinks, it'll be a change for you after *Wuthering Heights*.' Isobel had never been happy in Yorkshire, so obviously Olivia couldn't be expected to be, either.

'I miss Pippa so terribly,' Isobel went on, as she rummaged in the fridge and pulled out a small piece of pâté on a saucer, a plastic pot of supermarket hummus and two strawberry yoghourts. 'Really, I live on scraps these days. There's a tin of tomato soup we can have, and crispbread, you like that I know. And Wojtek brought me a bottle of Champagne. Open it, would you, darling?'

Olivia drank a whole glass of Champagne while her mother went to and from the kitchen setting out an exquisite but meagre supper in the front room. Isobel never ate in the kitchen. Narrow

but high-ceilinged, the dining room held a handsome small polished table dimly lit by a small high-up chandelier, and a tall glass-fronted cupboard filled with crested family porcelain, blue and gold on white. Dark blue velvet curtains muted the swish of traffic in rainy Elizabeth Street. What a contrast between this dark, elegant room and the little basement flat below, which Pippa had made so cheerful with the help of Ikea.

Pippa's space in the house had been like a small bubble of underground cosiness, a bright burrow of hope. After Isobel had left to play at a concert, Olivia would crutch her way down the wide carpeted stairs of Isobel's domain watched by family portraits hung at intervals down the walls, and then the narrower steeper ones to the basement where Pippa, her housekeeping jobs finished, welcomed her to sit on the little red Ikea sofa, provided hot drinks in red-spotted Ikea mugs and talked—about their little school in Ilkley, about Pippa and Mark's wedding plans. About anything but the accident; the horror; beautiful, brilliant Frederico who no longer existed. About being widowed, bereaved of the love of your life, your future wiped clean, at the age of twenty-eight. It was in this room, in a copy of *Yorkshire Life* Pippa's Mum had left when she'd stayed a weekend to see *The Lion King*, that Olivia first saw Oxhide farm advertised. In this room she knew at last what she wanted to do with Freddie's legacy of four million Euros.

Could you be homesick for a place you'd only lived in for months? Olivia thought intermittently about Oxhide throughout Isobel's drinks party later that evening, through the gallantries of her mother's coterie of elderly and not-so-elderly admirers, through the tiredness that threatened to overcome her after the long day. At last everybody drifted off with kisses for Isobel and noisy goodnights on the doorstep, and Olivia was free to go upstairs to her makeshift bed in the smoky drawing room. She remembered times here with Ben on the occasional weekends when their half term breaks coincided. If only he were here now, to laugh a little at their mother, and give his brotherly reaction

to her meeting the famous TV presenter. He was always an affectionate teaser.

After the excitements of the day, sleep came slowly on the lumpy sofa. She lay mulling over Andrew Bamberg's lecture, walking her new farm boundaries in her mind's eye, imagining the land teeming with microscopic underground life. How did you do DNA analyses, she wondered? Falling asleep she half-dreamed the cart shed housing a lab, with Andrew Bamberg emerging with a triumphant wave to tell her about exciting results.

'I thought we'd go to the park. It would be a shame not to enjoy the sunshine. It could be the last warm sun we'll get this year. Make some vitamin D when you can.' Olivia's godmother Jane strode up Whitehall in the brown lace-ups that were the one departure from her elegant senior civil servant outline. She walked everywhere, fast, which Olivia found bracing. When they reached St. James's Park, Jane made a determined swoop for a bench with a view of the pond, sweeping dead leaves and bird shit off the space beside her for Olivia to sit.

She came straight to the point. 'How can I help? Your father said you wanted my advice.'

'Mama says I'm mad,' said Olivia. 'A girl on her own, taking on a job she knows nothing about, trying to push herself into a closed community of strangers.'

'Isobel's still bitter about being blackballed by the Ilkley Lawn Tennis Club,' said Jane. 'You're not her, Olivia. And you're not a girl any longer. It's very sad about your husband, I liked him very much. But you have your own life to live. What do you want to do on your farm? That's the first question. Answer the *what* first, then you can work out the *how*. That's what the Minister always says.'

'I want to run it as a model hill farm. On scientific principles. Show how you can make a living and respect historic landscapes. I want to make a place people will come to learn.' She didn't mention that the dream had been Freddie's; it might have struck

Jane as sentimental misplaced loyalty. Olivia glanced down covertly at the emerald ring. The green of a Tuscan meadow, he'd said, sliding it on her finger, not yet three years ago. Her mind turned inward, away from St. James's Park to a mountain meadow with purple anemones dotting close-cropped grass, the scent and feel of it under her back.

'Sounds reasonable.'

Olivia looked hard at Jane's face to make sure this wasn't a joke. It seemed not to be. Feet-on-the-ground Jane saw nothing obviously unrealistic about it. A silence was broken only by a succession of quacks from a string of mallards paddling by.

'I went to an interesting talk yesterday, at the Natural History Museum,' said Olivia.

'Aren't you needed on the farm?'

'I haven't taken over the management yet. I'm using this time to learn, the practical side and the economics. And the science. The talk was by Andrew Bamberg, you know—*Invisible Wildlife?*—and it was rather relevant, I thought. About soil bugs and how they affect life aboveground.'

'I suppose you do need to learn about parasites,' Jane conceded. Obviously she was not a Bamberg fan and still saw microbes as things to get rid of, like the dreadful boss who Andrew had described.

'But that was the interesting thing. They do good as well as harm. There are millions, and with most we don't know what they do. It's a new frontier, he said.'

'He's a clever boy. I know his mother, Vanessa.'

'Really? How?' Plain-speaking in her charcoal suit, Jane was far from a media person or boffin. The Civil Service was her milieu.

'She's a very distant cousin. Rather a nuisance to us at Defra, I have to say. She uses her position to encourage the green lobby, all those well-meaning NGO's with unrealistic ideas about bees and butterflies.'

A missed beat followed. Jane's words weren't what Olivia

wanted to hear from her supporter; the raw emotion in her godmother's voice made her seem less reliable.

'You mustn't let Isobel discourage you,' Jane went on, recovering her even, civil servant's tone. 'I think you're doing a sensible thing. Farmers are friendly on the whole, they'll help if they think you're serious. I know a few. Not in the hills, I admit.'

'So far, they certainly are being very friendly. So do you think it'll possible for me to make a living farming at Oxhide? Well, more than a living—really make a go of it?'

'Why ever not?'

Olivia decided to trust Jane. 'It's what Fred and I planned. To promote hill farming and hill farmers. I wish there'd been time for you to see our farm at Trebbia in the Apennines. We were sure there must be a way to go on using the old methods, conserve the cultural landscape and still be a viable business. So when he left me a lot of money I decided to come back to my own roots and carry on his dreams, our project, but in the Dales. There are so many parallels. Respecting old methods that have evolved in the place—and made the place. Viable and productive methods, even today, without selling out to commercial interests that contribute nothing to conserving the traditional culture.'

'That's asking a lot. Was he succeeding? Most people nowadays would say it's a tough business, specially in the hills, in England. This single payment business is a shambles. And God knows what'll happen in future. I can help you, Olivia. I'm glad we had this talk. Actually I'd have thought that was more important than going to hear Vanessa's pride-and-joy amusing schoolchildren in the Cromwell Road.' Jane stood. 'Well, this has been lovely my dear, but I can't spend all day in the park. The Minister needs his draft paper by this evening.' Then, surprisingly: 'You're doing very well, Olivia. Go and see your father. He agrees with me.'

She kissed Olivia, shyly as she wasn't naturally kissy, and strode in the direction of Whitehall. Olivia, heartened, walked back to Elizabeth Street to collect her case and take a taxi to King's Cross for the four-fifteen to Leeds. As dusk fell on the London suburbs,

the darkened carriage window reflected Nicole Kidman, who smiled at her. There was a resemblance, actually—the set of the eyes, the intelligent look. How gratifying to be mistaken for a star. Would Andrew Bamberg seriously come to Oxhide? Freddie would be impressed—somebody in his league, supporting his widow, his vision. Olivia hardly felt up to receiving such a grand visitor—but one day, who knew? How extraordinary Jane was cousin to his mother, the shadowy Vanessa. The lights of midland towns thinned until, to the west, the moon showed the low profile of hills she recognised as the Pennines. Soon she was climbing into Giles's car at Skipton station, headed home to Oxhide.

When Pippa had asked her how she kept sane, alone on her hillside, Olivia had brushed her friend's concern aside and pretended to be self-sufficient. Inside, she was overturned. She lay awake at night and slept in the daytime. You had to have meals, not to eat was to give in to grief, to give up, be overwhelmed. The best times were when there was an obvious job. As Olivia swept dead leaves from the backyard and made an aromatic bonfire of them, her pleasure felt shared. Sometimes Freddie seemed to be around; her mind even supplied the hallucinatory sound of his cough, or the turn of his shoulder through a drift of smoke that swirled down in an autumn gust. On fine mornings she took her coffee on the front terrace, sat on the low wall alternately surveying her land, and tilting her hand in the morning light so his emerald ring sparked green. And then he felt so close that turning over her plans for the day's work—arrangements with the architect; the firm installing the Aga; with Mike Robertshaw about the sheep; getting in food and fuel; organising her college sheep course—was like two people in conversation. These autumn mornings the mist from the river often lay like a milky fluid blanketing the valley floor, and the morning the architect walked up out of it into her fields, his car parked invisibly on the road below, she saw him as Freddie for a whole minute, before taking a pull on her imagination. She would be faithful to her

husband, but not to the point of madness. How would she carry out their plans then?

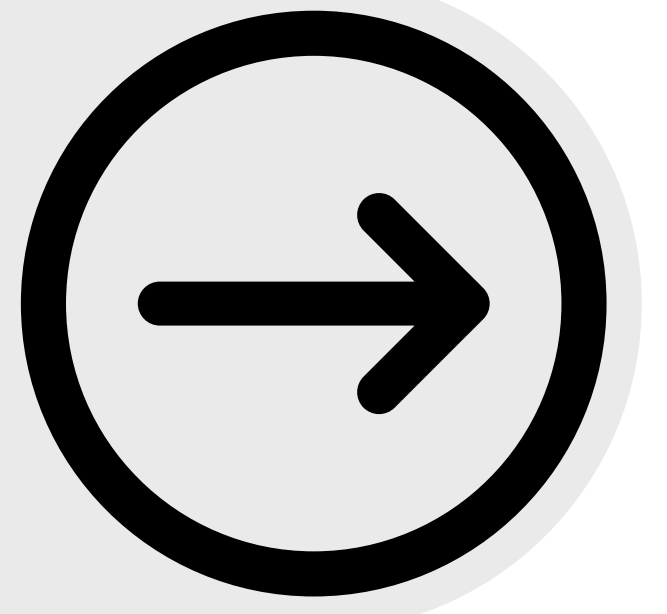
Sometimes grief enfeebled her and she would yield to a temptation to sprawl motionless on her new sofa like a teenager. When that happened she fought back by springing into activity. She bought trail running shoes and a track suit, and ran, at first along the road, but then, inspired by fell runners like the legendary Nicky Spinks, attempted to jog the circuit of her farm. After weeks her muscles grew able to keep the jog going even up the steep path through the in-bye pasture behind the house, rich with every sort of small plant—thyme, burnet, eyebright—surely a treat for grazing sheep. When she arrived, panting, at the massive drystone wall separating the bright limestone turf from dark heather and millstone grit above, she would stand atop the ladder stile and look down at her roofs, her farmhouse palace tucked into its niche on the hillside beside the cleft of the ghyll, guarded by tall ash trees shining gold with their remaining leaves.

By spring, the farm would be all bustle and change: clearing the old slurry pit, reroofing the outbuildings, wind turbines (a special mini-version, respecting the National Park regulations) on the moor; drystone walling including the huge project of buttressing the terraced front lawn, the holiday cottages, the track newly surfaced in limestone chippings. And then she always felt happy. Who wouldn't? How lucky she was, what a tribute to their love, this present from Freddie they now shared. She took to going for her run in the dusk of the November afternoons, lighting a fire before setting off. That way, wood smoke wreathed over the farmhouse in the temperature inversions of the first frosts; she wouldn't admit to herself she did it to conjure a manifestation of her dead lover.

She must look forward now: her thirties would be a new kind of life: independent, without hostages to fortune; with all the horror behind, a new Olivia Gabrieli.



**READ MORE**



***Native Soil* is available  
from your local  
bookshop or online  
from . . .**



**BARNES & NOBLE**  
**BOOKSELLERS**

**BLACKWELL'S**

**mooreweinberg.com**  
**ISBN 9798985428636**