



Mary Eleanor Cooper on her marriage in Dublin in 1900

CHAPTER TWO

The Cooper family

LIKE SO MANY OTHER ANGLO-IRISH Ascendancy families, the Coopers made links through marriage with suitable neighbours. The daughters of the next door estates or in the next county must have seemed a most convenient arrangement. Visits connected with the ownership of land led to the blossoming of social relationships and suitable men met eligible women. This was the case with my grandfather. His family had been in Ireland since about 1650 when Cornet Edward Cooper from Thurgarton, Nottinghamshire quarrelled with his royalist father and went to Ireland to serve in Cromwell's army. On the conclusion of the war, Edward Cooper was granted and bought over 5000 Irish plantation acres in Sligo, Cork, Tipperary and Galway. The Coopers settled in county Sligo, built a house at the turn of the river Unshion near Collooney and farmed the land. By the mid-eighteenth-century, Joshua Cooper was the largest proprietor in County Sligo, holding great political influence. He, and successive members of the family after him, served as MP's for the county in the Irish parliament until the Act of Union, and in Westminster until the twentieth century. The last representative, Bryan Cooper was a southern Unionist MP for county Sligo in the first Dáil after independence in 1922.



My mother

CHAPTER VIII

Return to the UK and my mother's last years

Back in Umkomaas, I helped my mother sell her house and pack up her belongings. With the latter, I straight away ran into trouble because it was almost impossible to persuade her to get rid of anything. I suppose that, partly because as a child in South Africa everything had been bought and sold in paper bags, she had stored a horrendous collection of containers: bottles, cartons and cans – all of which she wanted taken round to an Asian family living nearby, as she was sure they would be 'only too glad to have them'. This particular family was every bit as well off, if not more so, than the families living around them – the husband was the local butcher – and there was absolutely no way that I could turn up on their doorstep with my mother's offerings. For a while there was deadlock. In the end I'm afraid I simply lied to my mother and, after her afternoon nap, told her that I had taken stuff to her Asian neighbours when I had actually dumped it in the tip. No more was said – though I think my mother had a pretty shrewd idea of what was going on. (Truth may be the best policy but there are times when it is not the kindest.)



CHILDHOOD



My own sister, Ann, was born in December 1919. I was born in November 1922, after which my mother had a puerperal deep vein thrombosis (white leg) which nearly did for her. Thereafter she apparently was so terrified of pregnancy that only the menopause allowed her to enjoy sex again. I had a sort of resident nanny, Mary Anderson, and in fact I related to her as my mother and I have always been quite close to her family; John and Ginty. I kept in touch with John who retired to Littlehampton. His granddaughter went to Oxford (Univ). As was customary in those days Mary was treated as a servant and I spent most of the time

with her in the kitchen together with the maid. Unfortunately she died of a cerebral haemorrhage when I was nine which was a terrible loss. This happened when I was at Centrecliff (the prep school for St. Felix at Southwold), Ann already being there. My parents did come down specially to break the sad news. Because of the situation at home I enjoyed boarding school. We lived at 22 Friern Watch Avenue and it was only in 1928 the road was tarmacked. We did not seem to have neighbourly friends except Mr & Mrs Zimmerman next door. Ann was a bridesmaid at their daughter's wedding. Strangely enough (as they were Jewish) we always went to their house on Christmas morning for a drink. I only remember going to the Congregational church with Nanny. I had good friends at Edale school in Long Lane but I don't remember any of them visiting my home. There was Joan Ling, Bunty Rowe, Heather Ball and Jean Roberts (who lived in a boys' private school in Woodside Park). Mavis Harris, who lived opposite and was the same age as me, was not encouraged! Because of the situation at home I enjoyed boarding school. We had family seaside holidays in the summer. We used to take my maternal grandmother with us so she could baby-sit Ann and me, though she was no more maternal than my mother. One year we went to Tenby, and enjoyed some evangelical mission

BLUE PLANET

We call our little rocky planet: Earth,
But this reflects our lack of proper sight.
As farmers we are trapped amongst the dirt;
Red, brown or yellow though it be, the seed
Springs green to clothe the corn or mighty tree.
Even if the glory of the forest
May lift our soil-bound souls to greater heights,
Our home on land makes us forget the sea.

As the third planet from the sun rises
Above the desert moonscape for the eyes
Of lonely astronauts, only they perceive
Our world is truly blue, a lone sapphire
In the necklace around our golden star;
And so completes the spectrum of the worlds.

CAVITY SOLITONS

Day by day the even tenor of life
May seem routine and even dull,
Until the force of some event lights up
Our plight, and sets on fire our fierce desire
To pierce the fog of sameness to discern
The snowy peaks we seek to climb in vain,
Though bleeding fingers fiercely grasp the rocks.

The radiance of all radiation
May penetrate the curtain of our loss
And reach the caves of optics where they hide.
For here abide the nuggets of our lives
Illumined by the lasers of our brains,
Blossoming as cavity solitons
Of thought and feeling in our bursting hearts.

THE CORNISHMAN

Because you remind me of the sunless cliffs
Where the wild scabious grows,
And where the sloes are bitter,
And where the spray flares upwards from my
Childhood seas;

Because I know you without trying.
Because you are a stranger, yet mine own.
Because I've walked the path before you,
Walked the water,
Touched the stone,

I give you space.
But I do resent the anguish
That you bring,
And wish I didn't see your face in
Everything.

THE LOSS OF DAYS

This love, unbidden,
Not needed,
Has taken from my life
The comfort of a quiet mind,
And left me grieving.

I mourn the loss of little days
Spent in pursuit of quiet things,
When desire was met
And made complete,
In a few close friends,
A kitchen meal,
A jug of poppies
And of marguerite.

A Reason to Exist



Sue Moore

Memories of an Unmemorable Life

Rachel Urquhart

