This 1880 letter to her older sister Katie opens with Olive Schreiner invoking turn-taking in letter-writing as the expected norm – but also that there was “a good opportunity of posting” that she was nonetheless going to make use of. This was most likely a passing traveller, who would be entrusted to take letters to a town for posting. It invokes in a very immediate way the moment of its writing – “it is a bitterly cold evening” – and then in a low-key way comments “I must not forget to tell you” what Schreiner must have been simply bursting to tell her family and friends. This concerns her then-plan to train as a nurse in “England” (actually Edinburg h, in Scotland). The final paragraph in the letter is concerned with the Basuto War and one of its tragedies for the wider Schreiner family. A magistrate within the Colonial authority, Hamilton Hope was misled into attending a traditional ceremony thinking this was to defuse tensions, but he was murdered in a killing with some ritualistic aspects. Hope was married to Olive Schreiner’s cousin Emma, and she had stayed with the Hopes some two years or so before.

1: Lily Kloof
2: Nov 19 / 80.
3:
4: My dear Katie
5:
6: You have not yet answered my last; but there is a good opportunity of
7: posting; I’ll not let it pass without sending you a line.
8:
9: It is a bitterly cold evening, the mountains near this white with snow,
10: & every promise of a heavy frost tonight, for which I am very sorry
11: as we have been busy making gardens. Have you a flower garden at
12: Balmoral? I here have only gone in for vegetables which the good Boers
13: seem to like better.
14:
15: I must not forget to tell you that in February I am going to England,
16: to become a nurse in one of the large hospitals I have at last saved
17: enough money for the voyage; & my cough is so much better I think I
18: need not fear the climate. I can at least try! If it does suit me, I
19: shall never return to this country.
20:
The Basuto war is causing much trouble in this part of the country. Nearly all the young Boers have had to go to the front; & it is very hard just at this busy time of the year for them to have to leave their farms. At all events they make a great noise about it. Two men from this farm have had to go. I suppose you have read the notices of poor Hamilton Hope’s death. I felt it much for he & his wife were very good & kind friends to me when I was friendless.

Write soon dear Katie and believe me always
Your loving sister
Olive

Notation
Rive's (1987) version omits part of this letter and is also in a number of respects incorrect.