

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE WILD OATS OF HAN—1928  
COONARDOO—1929  
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- THE EARTH LOVER—1932

*Autobiography*

- CHILD OF THE HURRICANE—1963

# HAPPINESS

*Selected Short Stories by*  
KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD



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## FOREWORD

IN these short stories I have gleaned fragments from the lives of our people.

When I was a school girl, I loved Carlyle and tried to write my essays with his vigour and resonance. Then the suave and exquisite prose of Walter Pater captivated me: later I delighted in the French symbolists—the impressionism of Huysmans and Remy de Gourmont. I found in Chekhov, Gorky, and St Reymont, a use of words vital and austere, although my most devout homage was for Anatole France, the elegant subtlety and irony of his style. But I realized these were not for me, and what I wished to do in Australian literature.

Guy de Maupassant's "Contes Normands" gave me the short story technique which, more or less unconsciously, has influenced my telling of incidents and happenings in the country districts, and on the goldfields and in the cities of Australia.

I wrote something of this, explaining the origin of my style, when Professor E. R. Holme of the Sydney University in 1930 inquired the meaning of some words like "swamper" and "whim" used in *Working Bullocks*.

A critic had accused me of "loose and slipshod English"; but I told Professor Holme I had sought to use the living speech of our people, guarding against a dialect effect, and making the context of a sentence give the meaning of an unusual word or phrase.

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Professor Holme replied, in a letter which I have treasured: "As for 'loose and slipshod English', you need not give a thought to such foolish taxing of a style that is not merely correct (as correctness is in English) but alive with sensibility and individuality. It responds to the need of your characters. How often does a good style do that? I am very glad to learn that you have Carlyle and Anatole France especially in your mind and affection. The fact makes your independence and enterprise as a writer more significant of your powers."

I felt that I had not altogether failed to achieve something for Australian literature, when my old friend Nettie Palmer, herself a writer and critic of distinction, wrote to me in 1953: "If I had been well, I would have tried to express just what your writing has meant to me and to other writers of my generation. With your poetry, your love of idiom, and your gift of imagery, you helped to create a new style from the everyday Australian speech, and with your humanity you made us remember that there was nothing so well worth writing about as the loves, conflicts, and sufferings of our own people."

It has been thought that some notes about the stories in this volume might be of interest.

Those first published in *Kiss on the Lips* reflect life in the Darling Ranges when I came to live in Western Australia. "The Grey Horse" used to gambol in his stable yard below our orchard. He won the prize in an *Art in Australia* competition, and has appeared in several anthologies.

"The Curse" was written when the editor of *Art in Australia* requested me to write a story, freely, in any way that I wished. Henrietta Drake-Brockman says that it was "avant garde-ish" before the movement gained any ascendancy, although I have no desire to be associated with its present developments.

"The Cow" was our own beautiful Jersey, Cynthia—because she had horns like the crescent moon; but I was hardly her rival because I had only one son.

An incident related casually so inflamed my imagination that I travelled to an isolated cattle station, four hundred miles beyond the railway in Western Australia, to be sure of authentic details for "The Cooboo". Some critics have cited "The Cooboo" as a perfect example of short story technique.

"Happiness" belongs to the time when I was in the north-west.

Most of the native words used are those of the Gnarlur tribe which wandered about the sources of the Ashburton and the Fortescue. As to the meaning and spelling of words, I conferred with Mr Ernest Mitchell, for many years Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, who had a most extensive knowledge of aboriginal dialects. Now and then I have dropped the "g" before a word beginning with "n" to simplify the literal sound as in "narlu". You are supposed to hear the "g" sound before the native pronunciation of "n", but it is so slight as to be almost imperceptible. A few words such as "miah" are not western in origin, but have travelled overland from Queensland by stockmen and station owners. "Myall", meaning a wild black, is another of these native words which does not belong to the west, but is generally accepted as meaning an aboriginal who has had no association with white people.

Hugh McCrae, in the last letter he wrote to me, says: "Not long ago I have re-read *Kiss on the Lips*, and can never forget the entrancing story of the horse." He went on to say that he thought "Happiness" and "The Cow" two of the best short stories I had written.

Old prospectors on the Larkinville rush used to come up from the alluvial claims and sit round the camp-fire yarning for hours. I gathered many stories from their reminiscences, and, of course, invaluable material for the goldfields trilogy. Most of these stories, including "Luck" and "Jimble", are in *Potich and Colour*.

"Josephina Anna Maria" pleased my Roman Catholic friends, and it was chosen, also, as the best short story of

the year in a Russian magazine, *Soviet Women*. "The Siren of Sandy Gap", "Flight", "Marlene", "Painted Finches", and some of the stories in *N'goola* were retrieved from wanderings about the outback and country districts. "Marlene" is set in the south-west, near a coal-mining township. "The Elopement", too, is a story from the south-west.

All the stories were inspired by an intimate sympathy with men and women in the comedy and tragedy of their lives.

K.S.P.

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- "Gutless."  
 "Lazy."  
 "Liked reading."  
 "'Got any books?' he'd say."  
 "'Ride away with a bag full. . . .'"  
 "Happy as Larry."  
 "On his brumby."  
 "With his kangaroo dogs."  
 "Didn't like work."  
 "Said so."  
 "Liked reading."  
 "'And kangaroooin?'"  
 "'Bit of kangaroo tail soup. . . .'"  
 "'Goes all right."  
 "'Ever taste it?'"

The hut, dead trees row by row to make walls, with sheet iron for roof, beaten by storms and sun to the gleam and the white light of silver: empty, derelict. Rusty, the share of an old plough: a barrow of bush timber falling to pieces. Cart wheel under the fig trees.

But prowling beside the door, she sprang at us, the fawn-coloured bitch. Fell back, snarling, too weak to stand, belly sagging, a white bag beneath her. Starved, she crouched waiting for Alf to return.

Laughter of leaves, inhuman, immortal. From time immemorial into eternity, leaves laughing: innumerable small green tongues clacking, their dry murmur falling away with the wind.

Dark in the forest, under the red gums and jarrah. The wood-carter's track, catatrice of an old wound through the bush; but the leaves still chattering, lispings and muttering endlessly of Alf and the fawn-coloured bitch straining over her puppies down there in the sunshine. Gone from back-sliding eyes the sun-steeped valley between folding hills, and hut, dim, ghostly, in calm seas, fading tetraetheca and turquoise: birds flying across with jargon of wild cries.

## THE COOBOO

THEY had been mustering all day on the wide plains of Murchison station. Over the red earth, black with ironstone pebbles, through mulga and curari bush, across the ridges which make a blue wall along the horizon. The rosy, garish light of sunset was on plains, hills, moving cattle, men and horses.

Through red dust the bullocks mooched, restless and scary still, a wild mob from the hills: John Gray, in the rear with Arra, the boy who was his shadow: Wongana, on the right with his gin, Rose: Frank, the half-caste, on the left with Minni.

A steer breaking from the mob before Rose, she wheeled and went after him. Faint and wailing, a cry followed her, as though her horse had stepped on and crushed some small creature. But the steer was getting away. Arra went after him, stretched along his horse's neck, rounded the beast and rode him back to the mob, sulky and blethering. The mob swayed. It had broken three times that day.

John Gray called: "You damn fool, Rosey. Finish!"

The gin, on her slight, rough-haired horse, pulled up scowling.

"Tell Meetchie, Thirty Mile, to-morrow," John Gray said. "Miah, new moon."

Rose slewed her horse away from the mob of men and cattle. That wailing, thin and hard as hair-string, moved with her.

"Minni!"

John Gray jerked his head towards Rose. Minni's bare heels struck her horse's belly. With a turn of the wrist she swung her horse off from the mob, turned, leaned forward, rising in her stirrups, and came up with Rose. But the glitter and tumult of Rose's eyes, Minni looked away from them.

Thin, dark figures on their wiry station-bred horses, the gins rode into the haze of sunset towards the hills. The dull, dirty blue of the trousers wrapped round their legs was torn; their short, fairish hair tousled by the wind.

At a little distance, when men and cattle were a moving cloud of red dust, Rose's anger gushed after them. "Koo!"

Fierce as the cry of a hawk flew her last note of derision and defiance.

A far-away rattle of the men's laughter drifted back across country.

Alone the gins would have been afraid, as darkness coming up behind was hovering near them, secreting itself among the low, writhen trees and bushes: afraid of the evil spirits who wander over the plains and stony ridges when the light of day is withdrawn. But together they were not so afraid. Twenty miles away over there, below that dent in the hills where Nyedee Creek made a sandy bed for itself among white-bodied gums, was Murndoo homestead and the uloo of their people.

There was no track; and in the first darkness, thick as wool after the glow of sunset faded, only their instinct would keep them moving in the direction of the homestead and their own low, round huts of bagging, rusty tin and dead boughs.

Both were Wongana's women: Rose, tall, gaunt and masterful; Minni, younger, fat and jolly. Rose had been a good stockman in her day: one of the best. Minni did not ride or track nearly as well as Rose.

And yet, as they rode along, Minni pattered complacently of how well she had worked that day: of how she had

flashed, this way and that, heading-off breakaways, dashing after them, turning them back to the mob so smartly that John had said: "Good man, Minni!" There was the white bullock—he had rushed near the yards. Had Rose seen the chestnut mare stumble in a crab-hole and send Arra flying? Minni had chased the white bullock, chased him for a couple of miles, and brought him back to the yards. No doubt there would be nammerly for her and a new gina-gina when the men came in from the muster.

She pulled a pipe from her belt, shook the ashes out, and with reins looped over one arm stuffed the bowl with tobacco from a tin tied to her belt. Stooping down, she struck a match on her stirrup-iron, guarded the flame to the pipe between her short, white teeth, and smoked contentedly.

The scowl on Rose's face deepened, darkened. That thin, fretted wailing came from her breast.

She unslung from her neck the rag rope by which the baby had been held against her body, and gave him a sagging breast to suck. Holding him with one arm, she rode slowly, her horse picking his way over the rough, stony earth.

It had been a hard day. The gins were mustering with the men at sunrise. Camped at Nyedee Well the night before, in order to get a good start, they had been riding through the timbered ridges all the morning, rounding up wild cows, calves and young bullocks, and driving them down to the yards at Nyedee, where John Gray cut out the fats, left old Jimmy and a couple of boys to brand calves, turn the cows and calves back to the ridge again while he took on the mob for trucking at Meekatharra. The bullocks were as wild as birds: needed watching all day. And all the time that small, whimpering bundle against her breast had hampered Rose's movements.

There was nothing the gins liked better than a muster, riding after cattle. They were quicker in their movements,

more alert than the men, sharper at picking up tracks, but they did not go mustering very often nowadays.

Since John Gray had married, and there was a woman on Murrdoon, she found plenty of washing, scrubbing and sweeping for the gins to do: would not spare them often to go after cattle. But John was short-handed. He had said he must have Rose and Minni to muster Nyedee. And all day her baby's crying had irritated Rose. The cooboo had wailed and wailed as she rode with him tied to her body.

The cooboo was responsible for the wrong things she had done all day. Stupid things. Rose was furious. The men had yelled at her. Wongana, her man, blackguarding her before everybody, had called her "a hen who did not know where she laid her eggs." And John Gray, with his "You damn fool, Rosey. Finish!" had sent her home like a naughty child.

Now there was Minni jabbering of the tobacco she would get and the new gina-gina. How pleased Wongana would be with her! And the cooboo, wailing, wailing. He wailed as he chewed Rose's empty breast, squirming against her: wailed and gnawed.

She cried out with hurt and impatience. Rage, irritated to madness, rushed like waters coming down the dry creek-beds after heavy rain. Rose wrenched the cooboo from her breast and flung him from her to the ground. There was a crack as of twigs breaking.

Minni glanced aside. "Wiah!" she gasped, with widening eyes. But Rose rode on, gazing ahead over the rosy, garish plains and wall of the hills, darkening from blue to purple and indigo.

When the women came into the station kitchen, earth, hills and trees were dark: the sky heavy with stars. Minni gave John's wife his message: that he would be home with the new moon, in about a fortnight.

Meetchie, as the blacks called Mrs John Gray, could not make out why the gins were so stiff and quiet: why Rose

stalked, scowling and sulky-fellow, sombre eyes just meeting hers, and moving away again. Meetchie wanted to ask about the muster: what sort of condition the bullocks had been in; how many were on the road; if many calves had been branded at Nyedee. But she knew the women too well to ask questions when they looked like that.

Only when she had given them bread and a tin of jam, cut off hunks of corned beef for them, filled their billies with strong black tea, put sugar in their empty tins, and the gins were going off to the uloo, she realized that Rose was not carrying her baby as usual.

"Why, Rose," she exclaimed, "where's the cooboo?"

Rose stalked off into the night. Minni glanced back with scared eyes and followed Rose.

In the dawn, when a cry, remote and anguished flew through the clear air, Meetchie wondered who was dead in the camp by the creek. She remembered how Rose had looked the night before, when she asked about the cooboo.

Now, she knew the cooboo had died; Rose was wailing for him in the dawn, cutting herself with stones until her body bled, and screaming in the fury of her grief.

England; going to write a book about the aborigines. She wanted to see your camp."

"We're half-castes here—not abos," a morose, middle-aged man replied.

"And not 'at home' so early in the day," one of the young men added sarcastically. "It's a hell of a place to see, anyhow."

"Y're forgettin' y'r manners, Albert—swearin' before ladies!" one of the women said.

She giggled shyly.

"How's yerself, Mrs Boyd?"

"I'm well, Tilly. But you're looking like drowned rats, the lot of you. Why don't you shift camp for the winter, George?"

Mrs Boyd sat her upstanding mount squarely, as well-conditioned as he was. A good horsewoman, capable of managing her own affairs, it was evident. Her manner was authoritative, but kind and friendly.

"Where'd we shift to?" a fat, youngish woman asked jocosely. Barefooted, she stood, a once-white dress dragged across her heavy breast and thighs, a youngster slung on one hip. A little laugh nibbled its way through the crowd.

"This is the only place we're allowed to camp in the district," the man who had first spoken said sourly. "You know that, Mrs Boyd."

"The rain's been comin' down steady for two months."

One of the other women raised a flat, uncomplaining treble.

"How on earth do you manage to get a dry spot in the humpies or keep your clothes dry?"

"We don't." The crowd laughed as though that were a good joke. "Our clothes are all soakin'. There's not a dry blanket in the camp."

"We ought to be ducks. The rain'd run off our backs then."

"It's a disgrace you should have to live like this," Mrs Boyd declared. "But what I came about this morning is Mollie. Where is she?"

## MARLENE

COMING out from the trees, the camp on the hillside was almost invisible. It crouched among rocks and wet undergrowth, with the township lying under mists in the valley below. The wurlies of bark, bagging and matted leaves had taken on the colouring of the rocks and tree-trunks. They were shaped like mounds of earth: crude shells with open mouths. A breath of smoke betrayed them. It hung in the air and drifted away among the trees.

Two women riding along the bush track detected the first humpy, then another and another, until half a dozen were in sight about a rough open space. Dogs flew out, barking fiercely. Two or three children, barelegged, lean, sallow, bright-eyed, with black tousled hair, slid out from before the wurlies. A man lying beside a fire sat up and glanced at the women.

"Hullo, Benjy," the elderly woman on a grey horse called. "Sleeping in this morning? Where's Mollie?"

The man grunted, staring sullenly over the rain-sodden clearing. Men and women appeared at the open mouths of other wurlies, all dressed as they had been sleeping, in faded dungarees and khaki trousers, shirts and skirts grey with grime and grease, threadbare woollen jackets and coats—cast-off clothing of the townspeople.

"Hullo, Mrs Boyd," some of the women called.

"This is Miss Cecily Allison," Mrs Boyd explained, introducing the girl on the chestnut colt. "Miss Allison's from



The crowd shifted uneasily. Eyes encountered and glanced aside. A wild crew they looked in their shabby clothes, the women wearing remnants of finery, a bright scarf or coloured cardigan over their dragged dresses.

Brown-eyed, black-haired, they all were, but their skin varied from sickly yellow to weathered bronze. The women were sallow and tawny, the men darker. On most of the faces, thick noses and full lips denoted the aboriginal strain; a few others had sharp, neat features, showing no trace of aboriginal origin except in their eyes.

"Where is Mollie?" Mrs Boyd demanded. "I've been letting Mr Edward drive her in to the pictures on Saturday nights when he goes into town himself. But she didn't come back with him last week. He waited an hour for her."

"She's fair mad about the pictures, Mollie," Ruby bumbled.

"That's all very well, but it's not very considerate of her to run away like this. She knows how busy we are just now with all the cows coming in. Mr Phillip and Mr Edward 've got their hands full. I had to ride in with the mail myself this morning. And Mollie was very useful, helping with the milking and feeding poddies."

"She's a fine kid, Mollie," Albert declared.

"But where is she? What's the matter?"

The crowd surged. Obviously the question was disturbing: it had to be evaded. Exclamations and suggestions clattered. There was no surprise, no consternation, although everybody seemed upset, a little nervous and amused at Mrs Boyd's query.

Mrs Boyd guessed they were hiding Mollie. The child had got a quirk about something: one of those mysterious urges to go bush with her own kind.

"Did y'know Bill Biblemun took bad with the p'monia and died in hospital, Sunday week?" somebody asked. Others joined in eagerly.

"It was a grand funeral, Mrs Boyd."

"The Salvation Army captain said Bill'd go straight to glory because he was a good Christian."

"He was, too. Testified at street meetings and sang hymns—even when he was drunk."

"They said some beautiful prayers."

"All about his bein' washed in the blood of the lamb and his sins bein' whiter than snow."

"And the kids have all had measles," Ruby boasted.

"What's happened to Wally Williams?" Mrs Boyd inquired, willing to humour them. "He was to come over and cut fencing-posts for me last month."

There was a lull in the rattle of voices, eyelids fell, wary glances slid under them. Coughing, a hoarse whispering, filled the pause.

"He's gone up-country," George said.

"You mean, he's in jail. What's he been up to now?"

"Well, you see, Mrs Boyd, it wasn't hardly Wally's fault," Tilly Lewis explained. "Jo Wiggins said some steers had got out of his holding-paddock, and he offered Wally two bob for every steer he could track and bring in. Wally took in a couple of cleanskins. He thought they were Mr Wiggins's steers, natchery—"

"Naturally—at two bob apiece," Mrs Boyd agreed.

"But when the mounted trooper found a couple of red poley steer skins in Jo Wiggins's slaughteryard, Mr Wiggins put the blame on to Wally—and Wally got two years."

"Everybody knows Jo Wiggins's game," Mrs Boyd admitted. "But Wally ought to keep his hands off cleanskins."

"Oh, he's not like that, Wally, Mrs Boyd. He's a real good stockman. But if he can't get a job, he doesn't know what to do with hisself. He's jest got to be workin' cattle—"

"I know." Mrs Boyd laughed good-humouredly. "I suspect he's 'worked' calves from our back hills before now. We had an epidemic of milkers coming in without calves last year."

"If a cow drops a calf in the bush, Mrs Boyd, the dingoes are as likely to get it as—"

"Wally! Of course. But my money's on Wally. I reckon Jo Wiggins has had more of our calves than the dingoes."

Her horse, cropping the young grass, swung Mrs Boyd sideways. She saw the figure of a man sleeping before a smouldering fire at the entrance of his shack. Steam was rising from the damp blanket that covered him.

"Who's that?" she asked.

"It's Charley," a woman who had been coughing incessantly said. "He's not well."

"Better put that bottle away then," Mrs Boyd advised. "If the trooper comes round somebody'll be getting into trouble for selling Charley plonk again. Where does he get the money to buy drink, anyhow?"

"The shopkeepers take his drawings for showcards sometimes."

"He's quite an artist in his own way, Charley," Mrs Boyd explained to her companion. "Self-taught. Could you show Miss Allison some of Charley's drawings, Lizzie?"

Charley's wife slipped away, burrowed into the wurley, and returned with a black exercise-book in her hands. Miss Allison dismounted to look at the drawings, crude outlines of people and animals, a football match, the finish of a race.

Pleasure in Charley's drawings, awed interest and expectancy animated his friends and relations.

"Well"—Mrs Boyd yanked her horse's head round and straightened her back, smiling but implacable—"have you made up your minds yet to tell me about Mollie?"

The faces about her changed. There was a moment of sombre, unresponsive silence.

Then Tilly Lewis exclaimed delightedly: "Why, it's Mrs Jackson! She's been bad with the rheumatics; but got up—and put on her hat for the visitors!"

A withered little woman, a neat black hat perched on her head, walked across the clearing, wearing a dingy black

dress and frayed grey cardigan with an air of forlorn propriety.

"Good morning, Myrtle," Mrs Boyd said. "I'm sorry to hear you've been having rheumatism."

"What can you expect, Miss Ann?" The half-caste held herself with some dignity: her faded eyes, ringed like agates, looked up at the pleasantly smiling, healthy, fresh-complexioned woman on the big horse. "I'm not used to living out of doors."

"No, of course not," Mrs Boyd replied.

"You know I was brought up at the mission station. And I've worked in some of the best homes in the district; but now—you wouldn't keep a sow in the place where I've got to live."

"It's not right, Mrs Boyd," George muttered.

"No, it's not right," Mrs Boyd agreed. "But what can I do about it? Would you go into the Old Women's Home if I could get you in, Myrtle?"

"I've been there. The police took me from the hospital after I had rheumatic fever. But I ran away—"

"She did, Mrs Boyd!" eager voices chimed.

"She walked near on a hundred and thirty miles till she got here."

"Cooped up in the city—with a lot of low-down old women treatin' me like dirt. I've always kept myself to myself. I've always been respectable, Miss Ann."

"Oh, yes, she's terrible respectable, Mrs Boyd," the chorus went up.

"Nobody can't say Mrs Jackson isn't respectable!"

"All I want's to die in my own place—like any respectable person. It is my own place, Miss Ann, the house your father gave Tom and me; and Mr Henry had no right to turn us out."

"She's breaking her heart, like any old abo, for the hunting-grounds of her people," Albert said cynically. "They always want to go home to die, but, being half-and-

half, it's a roof over her head Mrs Jackson wants, and a bed to lie on."

"I'll see what I can do about it, Myrtle," Mrs Boyd promised.

"Funny, isn't it?" Albert's lounging, graceful figure tilted back as he gazed at her. "You're the granddaughter of one of the early settlers who shot off more blacks than any other man in the country. Mrs Jackson is the granddaughter of one of the few survivors, and related to the best families in the district. But you've got the land and the law on your side. They put the dogs onto her if she goes round the homesteads asking for a bit of tucker or old clothes.

"And this is the only spot where we're allowed to camp in the district."

"Something will have to be done about it," Mrs Boyd declared.

"What?" Albert demanded. "All the land about has been taken up. It's private property now. We're not allowed to work in the mines. We're not allowed to sell the fish we catch—not allowed to shoot or trap. They don't want us on the farms. They won't let us work on the roads. All we're allowed to do is draw rations and rot . . . though there is some talk of packing us off to one of those damned reservations where the diseased and dying remnants of the native race are permitted to end their days in peace. Excuse me quoting the local rag."

"You can't say I haven't tried to help you," Mrs Boyd protested. "I've always given you work on my farm when I could."

A wry smile twisted the young man's mouth. "And paid us less than half you'd have had to pay other workers."

"Albert!" one of the women objected. "Don't take any notice of him, Mrs Boyd."

"You're talking like one of those crazy agitators, Albert," Mrs Boyd cried hotly. "If you're not careful you'll find yourself being moved on."

"I'll remember you said so, Mrs Boyd." Albert grinned maliciously.

"It's hard on Albert not being able to get work, Mrs Boyd," Ruby expostulated. "He's real clever: can read and write as good as any white man. When he went to school he could beat any of the boys."

"Lot of good it's ever done me," Albert sneered. "If I'd been a myall I'd've had a better life. The blacks of any tribe share all they've got with each other. The whites grab all they can for themselves—and let even their own relations starve."

"Do the aboriginals treat half-castes better?" Miss Allison's voice rose clear and chilly against his wrath.

"They don't treat us like vermin." Albert might have been admiring the gleam of her hair or the horse she was holding. "Up in the nor'-west, when I was a kid, I went around with my mother's tribe. Never knew I was any different from the rest. Then my father got interested in me. Sent me down here to school. He died—and I've been trying to get a job ever since."

"Do you want to go back to your own people?"

Albert's anger resurged. "My own people!" he jeered. "Who are they? My father was as fair as you are. I couldn't live in a blacks' camp now—though this is as bad. But I don't belong there. I think differently. We all do. We like soap and clean clothes when we can get them, and books. We want to go to the pictures and football matches. I want to work and have a house to live in, a wife and kids. But this is all I've got. These are my only people—mongrels like myself."

"You shouldn't talk bitter like that, Albert," Mrs Jackson improved. "It does no good."

"Nothing does any good." He flung away from the crowd and stalked off behind the wurlies.

"He's sore because he can't get work and the Protector won't let Penny Carnarvon marry him," Ruby said. "Penny's in service, and she's such a good servant they don't

want to lose her. But she's fond of Albert. She says she'll learn the Protectorot."

"She will, too."

"Stella did, didn't she?"

"Too right, she did."

"She dropped a trayload of dishes to get herself the sack because she wanted to marry Bob. But the missus forgave her and took it out of her wages. Stella had to get herself in the family way, and make up to the boss, before the Protector decided she'd better marry Bob."

"Penny'll be going for a little holiday soon, Albert says. Then perhaps they can get married and go up north. He's almost sure he can get a job on one of the stations."

"But where's Mollie?" Mrs Boyd returned to the attack. The crowd closed down on their laughter and gossip. There was a disconcerted shuffling and searching for something to say.

"Mollie?"

"Yes, Mollie. It's no use pretending you don't know where she is. If she's hiding, doesn't want to come home, I'm not going to worry about her. But I'll have to let the Department know—"

"Hullo, Mrs Boyd!" A girl in a pink cotton frock stood in the opening of a wurley behind the horses. A pretty little thing, sturdy and self-possessed, but rather pale, she stood there, a small bundle wrapped in a dirty shawl in her arms.

"Mollie," Mrs Boyd gasped. "Have you been getting a baby?"

The girl nodded, smiling.

"But you're only a child," Mrs Boyd cried. "You're not sixteen."

"I was sixteen last month," Mollie replied calmly.

"It's scandalous," Mrs Boyd exclaimed indignantly. "Who's the father?"

Mollie's eyes smiled back at her. "I been going with two or three boys in town."

The little crowd before her quivered to breathless excite-

ment: a sigh, as of relief, and a titter of suppressed mirth escaped.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Mrs Boyd declared furiously. "You know, I thought better of you, Mollie. I thought you were different from the other girls. You've lived with me for so many years, and I trusted you to behave yourself."

"Don't be angry," Mollie said quietly. "I couldn't help it . . . and I like the baby."

"When did it happen?"

"Last night."

Mrs Boyd stared at the girl. She looked a little wan, but quite well.

"Is she all right?" she asked the crone who had come out of the hut behind Mollie. "Had I better get the doctor to come out and see her, or arrange for her to go into hospital?"

"I've never felt better in my life," Mollie said. "Aunt May can look after me."

"No need to bother," the old half-caste beside Mollie mumbled soothingly. "She hadn't a bad time. I'd have sent her to the hospital—but everything happened in such a hurry."

"Let me see the child," Mrs Boyd demanded: turned her horse and rode to Mollie.

"She's very little and red," Mollie apologized, tenderly lifting the dirty shawl that covered the baby.

Mrs Boyd leaned down from her saddle. It was the ugliest scrap of humanity she had ever seen; but there was something vaguely familiar in its tiny crumpled face. Cicely Allison dragged her horse over the grass to look at the baby, too.

"Ra-ther sweet, isn't she?" she murmured mechanically. "What are you going to call her?"

Mollie drew the shawl over the baby's face again.

"Marlene," she said happily.

The rain descended in a gusty squall, driving the half-

castes into their wurlies, the horsewomen back among the trees. As they rode, the older woman sagged in her saddle, curiously aged and grim.

"The sooner they're cleaned out of the district the better," she said viciously. "They're an immoral lot, these half-castes."

"What about the whites who are responsible for them?" the girl on the chestnut colt asked.

She wondered whether it was a tragedy or a comedy she had been witnessing. These people might live like dogs in their rotten wurlies, with the dark bush behind them and the prosperous little township spread at their feet; but their aspirations were all towards the ways and ideas of the white race. The exotic film-star, and that baby in this dump of outcasts—what an indictment! Yet Miss Allison suspected they had tried to spare the baby's grandmother, with simple kindness, knowing the truth behind Mollie's bravado. Had they altogether succeeded?

The camp on the hillside was moved on before the end of the month.

## N'GOOLA

STUMBLING and swaying, the old man climbed the sandy track. It wound through thin scrub and thorn bushes covering a low hillside.

Mary passed him as she came from work in the nearby township. The old man called after her. She stopped and he shambled wearily towards her. The bare toes with broken nails sticking out of shoes, thick with red dust, told her that he had come a long way.

'N'goola!' he cried. 'D' y' know a girl called N'goola in the native camp, missus?'

'Never heard of her,' Mary said and went on.

It was Saturday afternoon and she was in a hurry to get home. Her string bag, full of meat and vegetables for the weekend, slung her wiry figure to one side as she plodded with bare feet up the track, carrying her shoes. A woman of forty or thereabouts, wearing a neatly made dress of floral cotton, she had met the old man's eyes with the beautiful brown eyes of an aboriginal, but her hair was brackish brown, and there was a yellowish tinge in her skin.

The old man was a stranger, she guessed. A derelict from the remnants of tribes all over the Country who had wandered into the settlement of native huts on the far side of the hill. A place of refuge, it was, for the outcasts of his people, and hers—the men and women of mixed blood who were still regarded as aborigines.

Mary had little to do with the wild, gipsyish crew which

GLOSSARY OF ABORIGINAL WORDS

boogeriga  
 boujera  
 bulya  
 Bulyarrie  
 bungarra  
 cooboo  
 coolamon  
 coolwenda  
 coolyah  
 corroboree  
 curari  
 eh-erm  
 gilgies  
 gina-gina  
 jindie  
 koo  
 koodgeeda  
 kurrie  
 kylie  
 meetchi  
 miah  
 minnerichi

little green parrot  
 tribal territory  
 knobs  
 tribal group  
 iguana  
 baby  
 wooden receptacle for food or baby  
 north-west butcher-bird  
 wild sweet potato  
 ritual ceremony  
 thorny bush  
 yes  
 freshwater crayfish  
 dress  
 wooden food-gathering vessel  
 exclamation of defiance  
 legendary great snake  
 young and pretty woman  
 light boomerang  
 the missus  
 shelter  
 shrub with hard wood

GLOSSARY OF ABORIGINAL WORDS

movin  
 mumae  
 nammerly  
 narlu  
 n'goola  
 Nyoongar  
 tookerdoo  
 uloo  
 waich bronga  
 wandy-warra  
 wiah  
 wongi  
 woomera  
 wurlies  
 yienda  
 yukki

charm  
 father  
 a reward (usually tobacco)  
 evil spirit  
 wild boronia  
 black people  
 sweet stuff  
 camp  
 emu totem  
 loincloth  
 no  
 native people  
 spear-thrower  
 huts of bags and brushwood  
 you  
 exclamation of surprise

# Background

## A writer who knew Aust

MARY HICKS starts an occasional series on GREAT WA WRITERS

ATHARINE Susannah Pritchard was not born in Western Australia but is one of the best known and most highly-regarded of WA writers.

Meanwhile her interest in social justice and her passionate concern for people had led Katharine towards socialism and after her arrival in WA she was active in the peace movement and later joined the Communist Party.

The publication of her novel *Black Opal*, recalling her experiences in the opal country round White Cliffs, coincided with the birth of her son Ric. He has recorded in his biography of his mother, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers*, her happiness in the cottage at Greenmount, her enjoyment of the routine of rural life and the productivity of those years.

One of her most significant novels, *Working Bullocks* was published at this time. It deals with the life of timber workers in the karri forests of the South-West of WA.

As in all her works, Katharine is primarily concerned with the struggles of people to wrest a living from the land and to retain their dignity in the face of overwhelming hardship.

She was appalled at the living conditions of families on relief, identifying especially with women and children. A journey made by Katharine in 1926 to the cattle country of the Fortescue and Ashburton Rivers produced a rich harvest of stories of station life, cattle mustering and Aboriginal lore.

The beautiful story, *Coonardoo*, which tells of the love of an Aboriginal girl for the station owner's son, came from this period. It deals tenderly and poignantly with inter-race relationships.

She was eager to show the Aboriginal people as she had come to know them - dignified, astute and lovable. All Katharine Susannah Pritchard was not born in Western Australia but is one of the best known and most highly-regarded of WA writers.

studio among the fruit and creepers in Old York and Greenmount, was the one for much of her literary output from 1918 (when she was active in the peace movement and later joined the Communist Party).

om early childhood, Katharine cherished a driving ambition to become a writer, turning up her purpose as: "Katharine's Place," it is recorded in the Munding Shire property was recently purchased in the Munding Shire area.

er in Fiji, Katharine came to Australia with her journalist father in 1886 at the age of 12. In her autobiography, *Black Opal*, she has a finely-etched picture of herself as an intelligent, inquiring and later in Tas-

1915, her novel *The Opal* barely supported her while she wrote incessantly. The period of journalism in London, which tells of the love of an Aboriginal girl for the station owner's son, came from this period. It deals tenderly and poignantly with inter-race relationships.

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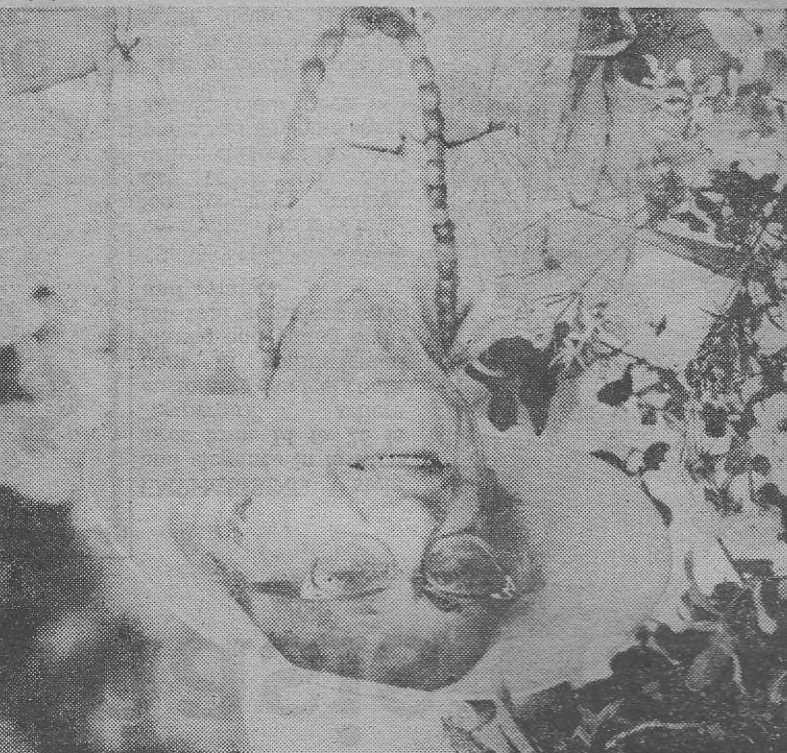
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Katharine Susannah Pritchard in December, 1968, on her 85th birthday. She died less than a year later.

Pritchard's work is characterised by meticulous research, none more than *Harby's Circus*, in preparation for which she travelled for months with a circus. It is a story of circus people, their disappointments, heart-aches and tragedies, yet of the life which stimulates and exhilarates them. The novel shows their fierce independence and their love for their trained animals and the long hours which go into their training. Again, it is a book of intense hardship, yet lit with humour and the courage and resilience of the human spirit. The trilogy of Goldfields life, *The Roaring Nineties* (1946), *Golden Miles* (1948) and *Winged Seeds* (1950) grew out of the experiences of the miners with whom Katharine and her husband had rubbed shoulders during the Larkinsville Gold Rush out of Coolgardie in 1930. She writes fearlessly of the victimisation of Aboriginal women by miners. The books are full of the colourful personalities who peopled the Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie districts in the goldrush days. While telling her tales, the author has documented the growth of the goldmining industry. There is the thrill of pegging a new field, the security of mate-ship and the ever-present hardship and the ever-present hardship of life in a pioneering world. There are the women of the goldfields, tough, resilient and resourceful like Mrs Sally Gough. "The couple were stranded and almost destitute when Mrs Gough started cooking meals for men working on the mines. She was a good cook and her dining room well patronised. After a while she had two or three empty shacks moved into the yard and made them available for paying guests." The hallmark of the books is action and the language is lively and colloquial. "The town went mad when the news of Bayley's find got round. Hell's bells, what a spree there was when Art