

# IN NO MAN'S LAND.

(An Australian Story.)

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## SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

The scene opens at the Cassowary Club, Sydney, in blazing midsummer. A certain member, nicknamed "The Bosun," has been detained in town to meet and entertain a new chum named Carew, who is out from home to go to one of the numerous stations belonging to a wealthy squatter sylept "Old Gordon," of Kur-yong. Gordon's son, a typical "far-out man" from "No Man's Land," meets young Carew at the Bosun's dinner party, and each takes immensely to the other. Carew is the typical Oxford athlete and sturdy, impassive Englishman; Gordon, a specimen Australian gentleman of the best bush type. After dinner they agree to try and see something of Sydney "nob" society, and attend a push dancing saloon. Carew's attentions to one of the "donahs" results disastrously, and the two friends are ignominiously chucked out. Both men are much afraid of the story getting about and making them ridiculous. Carew agrees to accompany Gordon back to a station in No Man's Land, and next day they leave for the "way-back" country.

Chapters III. and IV. relate the experiences of Carew and Gordon on the trip up the coast. They make the acquaintance of Miss Harriott, who is journeying northwards to take a governess' place on an up-country station. Carew, being a new chum, is made the butt of some practical jokes concerning a relative named "Conside" he is going to look for, but he shows his tormentors that he is able to look after himself, and thereafter enjoys peace. Chapter IV. closes with the cancellation of Miss Harriott's engagement by her employer, and Gordon at once engages her for his niece and nephew on the home station in New South Wales. She goes back in the steamer, and the two friends make a start on their journey inland.

CHAPTER V. describes the arrival of Gordon Carew at Barcoo, a typical up-country town. Mr. Paterson in a remarkably very elegant and a remarkably realistic picture is drawn of the wretched little galvanised iron township, and the extraordinary antics of a blackfellow, by a debutant. The description of the subsequent Police Court proceedings, where Gordon as the Jap Pee, a mounted policeman and the black delinquent at bench, in a remarkably unconventional manner, is related with great spirit. Carew takes the repentant blackfellow, who is called Fryngpan, for his servant, and all adjourn from the court to the hotel for drinks.

Chapter VI. tells how "old Gordon" made his money by buying cattle during a drought just before rain came, and what a disagreeable, purse-proud, violent-tempered tyrant he must have been.

Chapter VII. relates a misfortune to a roast turkey and old Gordon's departure from the station for Sydney in a violent temper. Miss Harriott, the governess who Charlie engaged on the boat, arrives, and proves to be charming but somewhat of a mystery, as she has such very smart things for a governess. She explains how she was brought up by an aunt and how that aunt lost her money, and Miss Harriott being too proud to go about amongst her old friends as a poor and a dependent, emigrated to Australia.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### POSS AND BINJIE.

At lunch the new governess met her future pupils, and after lunch she decided that she would spend the afternoon in cultivating their acquaintance. With this end in view she walked out into the big garden to see what they were doing. Mary Gordon had gone about some household concerns, and the old lady was in the kitchen supervising some jam making so the coast was left clear for her.

There was a quiet, restful feeling in the air. All nature seemed to be taking a siesta out of the fierce sunlight. The horses had drawn in under the shade of the trees, standing in pairs side by side, head to tail, each keeping the flies out of the other's eyes with his tail. Under the big willow tree in the yard the team of bullocks was drawn up, the big black beasts placidly chewing the cud, some standing up and some lying down, while the bullock driver was yarning over the fence with one of the maids. The locusts kept up a reposeful buzzing, and out of the depths of the shade trees an occasional magpie woke up and warbled sweetly and went to sleep again. Far away sounded the soft low gurgle of the river. The inexpressible quiet and restfulness of the scene were rudely broken by a vision of the children trooping off to their haunts at the back of the stables. Evidently something unusual was afoot. One of them carried a chaff bag, another had

a wire trap containing some small animal, and all the dogs on the place trooped at their heels, in a state of the greatest expectancy. Miss Harriott, feeling inclined to see what was going on, went over to them, and was shyly greeted by the two little girls. One of them, a blue eyed infant, who might have sat as model for an angel, but who, like Judas Iscariot, carried the bag, explained the situation. She said—

"We have got a native cat. Would you like to see it?" at the same time holding up for inspection the wire rat trap, in which there cowered a black and white spotted animal, with a muzzle like a ferret's.

"What a pretty creature," said Miss Harriott with hypocritical admiration—for, in fact, the creature was a spiteful looking animal enough. "What are you going to do with it? Make a pet of it?"

"No-o-o!" replied the cherub scornfully. It's an old one. It would never get quiet. We're going to put him in the bag with a dog."

So saying she opened the mouth of the bag, dexterously released the spring of the trap, and the native cat disappeared into the depths of the bag. Instantly all the small terriers began to whine and howl dolefully, evidently under the influence of excitement and fear combined. The big dogs jumped about, and barked in a frenzy—the din was awful.

"What is the matter with the little dogs?" said Miss Harriott, very much puzzled. "What are they howling for?"

"They know one of 'em has" said go in the bag and scruff the cat," said one of the boys.

"And don't they like it?" said Miss Harriott.

They would sooner settle the cat in the open," he said; "but in the bag it bites 'em and scratches their eyes. Sometimes the other dogs get excited and worry the bag, and the one inside has a bad time. Which one will we put in, Emily?"

Emily's eyes roved round the assembled candidates, who, with one accord, howled dolorously.

"Put Thomas Carlyle in," she said at last, with decision, looking at a small Scotch terrier, whose weirdly wise face bore no slight resemblance to the seer of Chelsea. "Put Thomas in. He was one of the beds this morning, so he deserves to go in the bag."

"Well, don't talk so loud till I grab him," said the boy, looking furtively over his shoulder at the dog, who at once began to look uneasy. "If he hears his own name he'll be off like a shot. There he goes now!" he exclaimed, as Thomas Carlyle suddenly tucked his tail, and set off at a sharp trot for the house.

"Here, Tommy, Tommy," he called, but the sage tucked his tail in tighter, and simply flew for dear life; pursuit was evidently useless. He was soon a small speck, tearing round the corner of the house.

"He doesn't want to go in, evidently," said Miss Harriott. "Where is he going to?"

"Oh, he'll hide in the wood heap till the war is over, I expect," said the eldest boy. "But any place where there is no bag and no cat is good enough for him," he added, gazing after him with considerable disgust.

"He's an awful cove about the bag. He's game enough at anything else. Well, who is to go in?" he repeated.

"Let old Pinch have a go," said the girl who answered to the name of Emily. "He hasn't had a go for a long time"—and a villainous looking, one-eyed fox terrier, who was simply quivering with excitement, was hoisted up and dropped into the bag, which was immediately tied at the top. Then a magnificent contest raged in the bag. It rolled over and over, in apparent convulsions, while from the inside came the howls of the dog and the sharp snarl of the cat. The children clapped their hands and danced with delight, while Miss Harriott looked on horror stricken.

across the open flat and lost itself in the timber.

"Nothin'," said the children, both together.

"Then what is there up that way?" she said, waving her hand up towards the foothills and the blue mountains. "There must be some pretty flowers to go and look at up there."

"No, there isn't," said the children.

"Well, let us go into the woods and see if we can't find something," she said, determinedly; and with her reluctant charges she set off, trudging across the open forest through an interminable vista of gum trees. After a while one of the girls said "Hell, there's Poss!"

Miss Harriott looked up, and saw through the trees, first of all, a large and very frightened bay horse, with a white face. On further inspection, there appeared a youth of about 18 or 20 on the horse's back, but he seemed so much part of the animal that one might almost overlook him at the first glance. The horse had stopped at the sight of them, and was visibly affected with terror. They advanced slowly, and the animal began snorting and sidling away among the timber, its rider meanwhile urging it forward. Then the child cried, "Hello, Poss!" and at once the horse gave a snort of terror, wheeled round, jumped a huge fallen tree, and fled through the timber like a wild thing, with its rider still apparently glued to its back. In half a second they were out of sight.

"Who is it? and why does he go away?" said Miss Harriott.

"That's Poss," said the child carelessly. "He and Binjie live over at Dunteralligo. He often comes over here. They and their father live over there. That's a colt he's breaking in for Aunt Mary to ride when it's quiet enough. He's very nice. So is Binjie."

"Well, here he comes again," said Miss Harriott, as the horseman reappeared, riding slowly round them in ever lessening circles, the colt meanwhile eyeing them with every aspect of intense dislike and hatred, and snorting between whistles like a locomotive engine.

The child waited till the rider reached the nearest point of contact, and said, "Poss, this is Miss Harriott."

The rider blushed, and half lifted his hand to his hat. Fatal error! for the hundredth part of a second the horse seemed to cower under him as if about to sink to the ground, and then whizz! the animal tucked his head between his front legs and his tail in between his hind ones, forming himself into a kind of circle, and began describing Catherine wheels in the air at the rate of a hundred revolutions to the minute; while, in the air above him, his rider also described a Catherine wheel or two before he came to earth, landing on his head at Miss Harriott's feet. The horse Catherine wheeled himself out of sight, making bounds in the air that would have cleared a house if one had been in the way. The rider got up, pulled his hat over his eyes, brushed some mud off his clothes, and came up to shake hands as if nothing had happened, his motto apparently being *Toutjours la politesse*.

"My word, can't he buck, Poss," said the child, pointing to the horse, now a speck in the distance. "He chucked you all right, didn't he?"

"He got a mean advantage of me," said the young fellow in a slow drawl. "Makes me look a fair chump, doesn't it, getting chucked before a lady. I'll take it out of him when I get on him again. How do you do?"

"I'm very well, thank you," said Miss Harriott. "I hope you are not hurt. It was my fault going to shake hands. What a nasty beast! I wonder you aren't afraid to ride him."

"I ain't afraid of him, the cow! He can't sting me fair work not the best day ever he saw. He can't buck," he added in tones of the deepest contempt, "and he won't try when I've got a fair hold of him; only goes at it underhand, like when I'm leaning over like that. It's up to me to give him a hidin' next time I ride him, I promise you."

"Where will he go to?" said Miss Harriott, looking for the vanished steed. "Won't he run away?"

"He can't get out of the paddick," drawled the youth. "Let's go up to the house, and get one of the boys to run him in. He had a bit of a go-in this morning with me—the bit kem out of his mouth somehow, and he did get to work proper. He went round and round the paddick at home with me on him, buckin' like a brumby. Binjie had to come out with another 'orse, and run me back into the yard. He's

"Old Pincher always howls," said the eldest boy. "He got one eye scratched out at this, and he doesn't like it now."

Just then a piercing yell from the dog inside showed that the cat, for a time at any rate, was holding its own.

"Got Pincher by the lip, I reckon," said the cherub. "Good old Pinch! Stick to him!" she screamed. The other dogs were dancing round, frantic with excitement, and when the bag gave an extra leap into the air they could contain themselves no longer. They threw themselves on it, and commenced to worry it in a frenzy of enthusiasm, while the children kicked them and struck them with sticks.

The new governess looked on aghast for a few seconds, not knowing what to do. Then she dashed into the fray. "Stop it at once!" she said. "You naughty children!"

"It's all right, Miss," said a slow, masculine voice behind her, and looking round she saw the bullock driver, a large Herculean colonial, who had lounged over, and was looking on critically, leaning on his whip. "They won't come to no 'arm, bless—Ho, me leg!" he yelled. "Let go me leg!"

While he was talking, Charley Gordon's blind old bulldog, long ago pensioned off, had come limping down to the fray, glaring round with his sightless eyes. He pined for his share in the sport that was going on, and Providence was good to him, as the very first thing he walked against was the bullock driver's leg, on to which he immediately fastened. He had to be scientifically choked off by the eldest of the gang, while the bullock driver in vain tried to keep down the oaths that rose to his lips. Miss Harriott fled in horror, leaving the children to empty out of the bag the body of the cat—and Pincher, bleeding, breathless, but triumphant. Then she called the children up to the house, and read them a lecture on cruelty to animals in general, and native cats in particular—a lecture that did not appear to profit them much. Indeed, the youngest child—a youngster too small to talk distinctly—after listening to her with the utmost scorn, said:

"'Hoo! Zhay tattes'er till shickensh!" and was inwardly of opinion that the taking of chickens was only reasonably atoned for by combat to the death in the bag. By way of improving matters they gave their governess an invitation to go with them to see some 'possums burnt out. This entertainment consists in setting fire to the butt of a dead tree, and as most Australian trees are hollow, the fire is soon drawn up into the trunk and lower limbs on the principle of a factory chimney. The 'possums, who are asleep in the hollow limbs, then have to hustle out, quick and lively, to avoid being roasted alive; they climb to the very top of the burning tree, where they sit and blink in the daylight, the picture of misery, till the tree burns through beneath them; then down they come a terrific crash, 'possums, branches and all, and the dogs rush in among the smoke and cinders, and worry the 'possums to death, and all is joy from the juvenile point of view. Luckily for herself, Miss Harriott thought it better not to join in this entertainment, as the cat and bag episode had been quite enough for one day, so she let the boys go off to their 'possum burning, while she took the two little girls for a walk.

Now, no true Australian, young or old, ever takes any trouble or undergoes any exertion, or goes anywhere, without an object in view. They are like the fish in Lewis Carroll's book, who never went anywhere without a "porpoise." So the two little girls obviously considered it the height of stupidity to walk simply for the sake of walking, and they kept asking where they were to walk to.

"What will we see if we go along this road?" said the teacher, pointing with a dainty parasol along the dusty wheel track that meandered away