My Brilliant Career

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MILES FRANKLIN

Like the protagonist of her novel *My Brilliant Career*, Miles Franklin was the daughter of an Australian landowner and a descendant of aristocrats. Her family moved around during her childhood and early adulthood, losing more and more money until they finally settled in a suburb of Sydney in 1915. Her family could not afford an extensive education, but Franklin nevertheless took an interest in literature and writing, and she published *My Brilliant Career* when she was only 22. As a young woman, she worked as a nurse and a housemaid until moving to the United States in 1906. For the next several years, Franklin worked as a secretary and assisted in philanthropic efforts. In 1915, she moved to England, where she continued to write. In her time away from home, her patriotism and love of Australia grew, and she returned to Australia in 1932. She wrote more novels about the Australian bush under the pseudonym Brent of Bin Bin, and she was actively involved in Australia's literary world. Like Sybylla Melvyn (the protagonist of *My Brilliant Career*), Franklin prioritized her career over romance, and she never married.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Feminism was gaining traction in Australia when Franklin was writing *My Brilliant Career*. Australian women fought for suffrage throughout the late 19th century, inspired by their New Zealand counterparts, who made history in 1893 as the first women in a self-governing nation to achieve the right to vote. Many Australian states legalized women's suffrage in the 1890s, and in 1902, Australia granted its female citizens the right to vote in all federal elections. Other social movements also began in the 1890s, including labor movements and the movement to form a federalist Commonwealth of Australia.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The 1903 novel *This is Life* was written by Australian author Joseph Furphy, a contemporary and associate of Franklin's. It examines rural life in late-19th-century Australia, and it makes use of Australian slang and dialect. Another friend to both Furphy and Franklin was teacher Kate Baker, who worked with Australian writers such as poet John Shaw Neilson and essayist Nettie Palmer. Because *My Brilliant Career* largely revolves around Sybylla's navigation of social customs and expectations, it's also worth considering the book alongside famous novels of manners like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* or *Sense and Sensibility*, in addition to Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*—all of which feature young women making their way through challenging societal conventions in ways that often parallel Sybylla's experience in *My Brilliant Career*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** My Brilliant Career
- **When Written:** 1899
- **Where Written:** Australia
- **When Published:** 1901
- **Literary Period:** Realism, Australian Nationalism
- **Genre:** Roman à clef
- **Setting:** Australia, 1890s
- **Climax:** Sybylla rejects Harold's marriage proposal for the last time
- **Antagonist:** Poverty, Sexism, Oppressive Institutions
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Surprise Sequel. Miles Franklin wrote a sequel to *My Brilliant Career*, titled *My Career Goes Bung*, but it remained unpublished until 1946.

Honoring Australians. The Miles Franklin Literary Award is an annual literary prize established in 1957 to honor Australian literature.

PLOT SUMMARY

In late 19th-century Australia, Sybylla Melvyn comes of age while her family undergoes serious financial struggles. Though Sybylla starts life wealthy, her father moves the Melvyns to a ranch on Possum Gully in an attempt to make a career trading stocks. He fails, and the family turns to dairy farming to make a living. The labor is hard and unrewarding, and Sybylla longs for the chance to make something of herself.

Sybylla gets in frequent disagreements with her mother, and when Mrs. Melvyn writes to her own mother, Mrs. Bossier, the older woman offers to take Sybylla in at the Bossier estate. At the estate, called **Caddagat**, Mrs. Bossier promises to refine Sybylla into a proper lady and prepare her for marriage. Sybylla eagerly leaves Possum Gully and falls in love with life at Caddagat, where she lives with her grandmother, her Aunt Helen, and her Uncle Julius. Also residing at Caddagat is the laborer Frank Hawden, who makes several advances on Sybylla despite her repeated rejections.

While at Caddagat, Sybylla meets two young men: Harold Beecham and Everard Grey. Harold Beecham owns the neighboring estate, and he and Sybylla quickly begin a playful, teasing courtship. Everard Grey is Mrs. Bossier's adopted son, and when he visits for Christmas, he encourages Sybylla to take up a career on the stage. Sybylla, who loves to perform, is taken with the idea, but Mrs. Bossier insists that such a career would be unladylike and improper. Eventually Everard and Mrs. Bossier find a compromise, and agree that Sybylla may visit Sydney with Everard the following year.

Sybylla and Harold's relationship develops, and eventually he asks her to marry him. She is surprised, but she accepts. When Harold leans in to kiss her, however, she panics and strikes him with a whip. Sybylla is horrified by her unwomanly behavior, but Harold forgives her, and the two begin a secret engagement.

Their romance is interrupted when Harold abruptly loses his fortune. He offers to free Sybylla from her obligation to him, but she insists on remaining betrothed, believing that she can help him in his new life of poverty. Harold plans to set out to find a new fortune, and Sybylla proposes a plan: they will not see each other for four years, and if at the end of that time Harold still wants to marry her, then she will marry him. Harold agrees, and the two separate.

Soon after, Mrs. Melvyn writes to inform Sybylla that Mr. Melvyn has fallen into debt to a man named Peter M'Swat. To help the family, Sybylla will need to leave Caddagat and work as a governess for the M'Swat family at their home in Barney's Gap. Sybylla is horrified. She tries to refuse, but Mrs. Bossier insists that Sybylla obey her mother. Thus, Sybylla leaves Caddagat and goes to live with the M'Swats.

The M'Swats' home is filthy and squalid, and the M'Swats themselves are appallingly ignorant. Sybylla has no access to the cultural refinement she desires: Mr. M'Swat can only barely read, so the only literature about the house is in the form of farming records and newspapers. And though the M'Swats have a piano, it is broken and out of tune. Sybylla's work as a governess is difficult, since the M'Swat children look down on the Melvyn family and Mrs. M'Swat refuses to discipline them. Finally, Sybylla exerts her authority over the children and manages to earn their respect.

Sybylla is deeply depressed by life at Barney's Gap. She writes to her mother and grandmother, begging to return to Caddagat, but they insist that she remain at Barney's Gap for at least another year. Sybylla's hopelessness eventually drives her to a complete mental and physical breakdown. She becomes bedridden, and the concerned M'Swats send her back to her family at Possum Gully.

Mrs. Melvyn is cross with Sybylla for her behavior at the M'Swats, and the relationship between mother and daughter grows increasingly contentious. When Mrs. Bossier offers to bring one of the Melvyn children to Caddagat, Mrs. Melvyn sends Sybylla's younger sister Gertie instead of Sybylla. While Gertie is at Caddagat, Harold returns to the neighboring Five-Bob Downs––he has earned a new fortune. Sybylla assumes that Harold will prefer her pretty younger sister, so she writes to him and calls off the engagement.

Sybylla falls into the monotony and toil of life at Possum Gully, until her boredom is interrupted by the sudden arrival of Harold Beecham. The four years have passed, and he, having taken her rejection as a joke, has come to marry Sybylla. With difficulty, she turns down his proposal. She realizes that she could one day marry a man, but that man needs to have suffered as she has so he can truly understand her.

Sybylla ends her story alone, with no prospects, musing on the nature of ambition. It seems pointless to her now, since everyone eventually dies, but she throws off her pessimism and rejoices in her status as an Australian. She is proud of her nation and of the peasants who make it the country it is. She takes in the Australian horizon—accepting that she is simply a woman of the bush—and wishes her reader good night.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sybylla – Sybylla is the novel's narrator and protagonist. She is deeply ambitious, and she strives for a "brilliant career" in the literary or performing arts, but she is held back by restrictive gender norms and her family's poverty. Sybylla moves among various homes throughout the novel, each one representing a vast shift in privilege––Possum Gully replaces the refinement and culture of Bruggabrong with weariness and toil, and the brief reprieve Sybylla finds at **Caddagat** comes to an end when Mr. Melvyn's debts force Sybylla to work at Barney's Gap. Sybylla's first-hand experiences with poverty make her more empathetic with Australia's peasant class than her wealthy relatives are; though she wants more for her life than to be a peasant, she respects the peasantry as the foundation of the nation. Her political consciousness separates her from her family, contributing to Sybylla's feeling of being unlovable. She is constantly seeking affirmation from the people she loves, but no matter how much they reassure her of their love, Sybylla never believes that anyone truly loves her. This insecurity counteracts Sybylla's natural empathy when it comes to her engagement with Harold Beecham. She is so confident that Harold cannot love her that she dismisses the genuine pain he feels at her rejection. Sybylla's insistence to remain unmarried also divides her from her relatives, especially Mrs. Bossier, who believes that a woman's purpose is to be married. By the end of the novel, Sybylla realizes she could only marry a man who has suffered as she has and truly understands her. This reveals why Sybylla has never felt loved: she equates being loved with being understood, and Sybylla is too unlike those around her to

believe that they understand her.

Harold Beecham – Harold is Sybylla's love interest and, for much of the story, her fiancé. He is usually quiet and stoic, but people who know him well speak of his bad temper. Sybylla is intrigued by the idea that the stony Harold could experience passion, and she strives to provoke Harold to see his temper flare. Despite Sybylla's dislike of men, she admires Harold's manliness, and she is often ashamed when her own behavior toward him is unwomanly. As the owner of the Five-Bob Downs estate, he possesses great wealth, which would entice any woman in the country to marry him––in fact, many of Sybylla's friends and relatives assume she is marrying Harold for his fortune. She insists this is not the case, and she proves as much when she agrees to continue the engagement after Harold loses his fortune. She is actually more determined than ever to marry him after this tragic turn of events, since she believes that as his wife she can help Harold recover from the loss. Once he makes a new fortune for himself, Sybylla thinks herself free of this obligation and ends the engagement. She is convinced that both she and Harold would be happier without being married to each other, and this belief awakens her "latent womanliness" that enables her to finally turn Harold away for good. Harold's manliness has helped Sybylla define her womanliness, but it is that womanliness that gives Sybylla the strength to reject him.

Mrs. Melvyn – Mrs. Melvyn is Sybylla's mother, with whom Sybylla has a strained relationship. Sybylla loves and respects her mother, but Mrs. Melvyn expects Sybylla to fit a mold of obedient womanhood and daughterhood that Sybylla refuses to abide by. Mrs. Melvyn is a refined woman, the descendent of aristocrats, and Sybylla recognizes the toll that poverty takes on her. Sybylla often defines Mrs. Melvyn's womanhood by her refinement, suggesting that Mrs. Melvyn does not know how to be a woman without following traditions of upper-class femininity, which contributes to her concern about Sybylla's unrefined, untamed nature. Mrs. Melvyn sees Sybylla as troublesome and attention-seeking, and she dismisses Sybylla's distress at Barney's Gap until Sybylla suffers a severe breakdown. Even after Sybylla returns to Possum Gully, the two of them argue frequently––yet Mrs. Melvyn confides in Sybylla, revealing a secret wish to have remained unmarried and her fears that her children will become failures like their father. At the end of the story, Sybylla yearns to connect with her mother. She wishes that she shared her mother's adherence to orthodoxy, or that her mother shared Sybylla's ambition, but ultimately the two are too different to ever understand each other.

Mrs. Bossier – Mrs. Bossier is Sybylla's grandmother, Mrs. Melvyn's mother, and the lady of the **Caddagat** estate. Wealthy, influential, and old-fashioned, Mrs. Bossier is a stickler for propriety, and though she enjoys Sybylla's company, she will not hesitate to chastise her granddaughter if Sybylla behaves in an unwomanly manner. She believes that every woman's goal should be marriage, and she forbids Sybylla from traveling to Sydney to pursue a career on the stage. Mrs. Bossier scorns any woman who gives up life as a wife and mother to pursue a career, and she feels that ambition is ruining the current generation of girls. Sybylla loves staying with Mrs. Bossier at Caddagat, but after Sybylla has to go to Barney's Gap, she loses faith in her grandmother's love for her. Mrs. Bossier cares for Sybylla, but she refuses to intervene in disagreements between mothers and daughters, so she does not invite Sybylla to return to Caddagat when Sybylla is struggling at Barney's Gap. Instead, Sybylla's sister Gertie goes to live with Mrs. Bossier, and Mrs. Bossier finds the sweet, pretty Gertie much more agreeable than the steadfast Sybylla. This adds to Sybylla's belief that she is unlovable, as she perceives Gertie's presence at Caddagat as a replacement for her own.

Aunt Helen – Aunt Helen is Sybylla's maternal aunt who lives at **Caddagat**. Sybylla describes her as a noble and brave woman, whose heart was broken in youth by a man who left her for another woman only a year after their wedding. Due to sexist double standards, the divorce had little impact on Helen's husband, but it ruined her socially and she has never recovered. Helen's tragic past represents the dangers of womanhood and the power that women grant to men by accepting their advances. Of the residents of Caddagat, Helen is the most openly loving toward Sybylla, and she works to improve both Sybylla's appearance and her self-confidence. However, once Sybylla is in Barney's Gap, Sybylla's belief that Helen understands her is broken when Helen suggests that Sybylla bear her cross patiently. Sybylla writes a bitter reply, and Helen never speaks to or about Sybylla again. The loss of Helen's companionship challenges Sybylla's belief in any kind of meaningful friendship, since the one person whom she thought understood her has proven untrustworthy.

Frank Hawden – Frank Hawden works at **Caddagat** as a jackaroo (a laborer working to gain management experience). Though he initially dismisses Sybylla as ugly, he soon becomes infatuated with her. She attributes his feelings to the lack of other young women at Caddagat, and though he insists he loves her and wants to marry her, Sybylla continues to spurn him. His constant advances frustrate her, and her rejections grow ruder and more audacious until Hawden vengefully reports to Mrs. Bossier that Sybylla has made unwomanly advances on him. His treatment of her cements Sybylla's distaste for marriage and her dislike of men. However, when Sybylla has to leave the Bossiers, her love for Caddagat overcomes their tumultuous relationship, and Sybylla and Hawden separate as friends.

Mrs. M'Swat – Mrs. M'Swat is the matriarch of the M'Swat family, whom Sybylla comes to work for after her father falls into the debt of Mr. M'Swat. Mrs. M'Swat is untidy and uncultured, and she overly indulges her children by taking their

side when Sybylla tries to discipline them for misbehaving during lessons. Sybylla attributes this lack of discipline to Mrs. M'Swat's ignorance, believing that Mrs. M'Swat does not know how to properly run a household. Mrs. M'Swat lacks the refined femininity of Sybylla's relatives, and her character exemplifies how poverty and ignorance can corrupt traditional feminine values like domesticity. However, Sybylla's representation of Mrs. M'Swat does not dehumanize the woman: Sybylla respects Mrs. M'Swat's good nature and her faithfulness to her husband, and she especially respects Mrs. M'Swat's ability to suffer through childbirth so many times. Further, Sybylla envies Mrs. M'Swat's ability to be content with no ambitions. This envy suggests that although a peasant woman does not fit the 19th-century ideal of femininity, she is not entirely isolated from social groups because she is understood by other peasants.

Mr. M'Swat – Mr. M'Swat is the patriarch of the M'Swat family, and his loans to Mr. Melvyn lead to Sybylla's employment at the M'Swat house at Barney's Gap. Sybylla describes him as "an utterly ignorant man" whose small ideas fit the small life he leads. He is only barely literate, and he spends his Sundays reading the local paper with the enthusiasm an educated man might have for poetry. Mr. M'Swat's house and family are distressingly dirty and unstimulating for Sybylla, but he is kind to her, and she respects his upright morals. Sybylla takes offense when he believes she intends to marry his son Peter, but she quickly realizes he was only trying to look out for her.

Mr. Melvyn – Mr. Melvyn is Sybylla's father. In her early life, he is Sybylla's hero: supportive, chivalrous, gentlemanly, ambitious. However, that ambition leads to his undoing when Mr. Melvyn moves the family to Possum Gully in the hopes of pursuing a career in stocks. This ambition falls through, and Mr. Melvyn descends into alcoholism. He stops providing for his family and becomes a burden on them. Sybylla takes on the responsibility of following him around the pubs in town so she can walk him home once he is too drunk to continue. He takes on loans that he cannot pay back, and this debt is what forces Sybylla to work for the M'Swats. His fall from a loving father to a burden on his wife and children represents the dangers of both ambition and marriage.

Gertie – Gertie is Sybylla's younger sister. Unlike Sybylla, Gertie is pretty, polite, and obedient, and both Mrs. Melvyn and Mrs. Bossier find her easier to get along with than Sybylla. In this way, Gertie models idealized youthful femininity: she is the girl Sybylla wishes she could be. Despite this, Sybylla does not resent Gertie. Rather, she craves Gertie's affection, even though Sybylla acknowledges she has never been kind enough to Gertie to earn that love. When Gertie meets Harold Beecham at **Caddagat**, Sybylla assumes that Harold will prefer Gertie to herself. The rest of the family also assumes that Gertie and Harold will be married, but Harold only sees Gertie as a little sister. At the end of the novel, Gertie has not followed Sybylla's journey from girlhood to womanhood, instead remaining youthful, happy, and "butterfly-natured."

Uncle Julius – Uncle Julius is Sybylla's good-natured bachelor uncle who lives at **Caddagat**. He is jovial and affectionate; however, Sybylla suspects that his love for her is less than genuine when he showers Gertie with the same terms of endearment that he once used with Sybylla. Julius also makes fun of Sybylla's desire to help the homeless workers who come through the family property. He believes that the poor experience poverty only because they are too lazy to achieve wealth, revealing that his kindness to his loved ones conceals a deep-seated prejudice against those outside of his social sphere.

Everard Grey – Everard Grey is the orphaned son of English aristocrats and the adopted son of Mrs. Bossier. He is sophisticated, worldly, and well-educated on all artistic subjects. He compliments Sybylla's singing and ability to perform, and praise from such an artistic man brings her great joy. Everard asks Mrs. Bossier if he may bring Sybylla to Sydney to train as a performer, but Mrs. Bossier refuses. He persuades Mrs. Bossier to allow Sybylla to visit him in Sydney the following year, but when Mr. Melvyn's financial straits force Sybylla to leave **Caddagat**, that visit is canceled. Everard represents Sybylla's hopes of a "brilliant career" in the world of performing, and his disappearance from Sybylla's life mirrors the loss of that dream as a viable option.

Joe Archer – Joe Archer is a well-read jackaroo (a laborer working to gain management experience) from Five-Bob Downs who likes to discuss literature with Sybylla. His fear of Harold Beecham, his employer, stirs Sybylla's interest in the passionate side that Harold keeps hidden from her. His interest in literature also marks him as the only working-class character in the story who is not content in ignorance, a quality that hints that Sybylla's generalizations about Australia's peasantry should be taken with a grain of salt. The fact that he seems to share some of Sybylla's ambitions for a life in which he can discuss matters of culture implies that people of all walks of life can have dreams and share them with each other.

Jane Haizelip – Jane Haizelip works for the Melvyns at Possum Gully until they can no longer afford to employ her. She hates Possum Gully as much as Sybylla, and she is openly disdainful of the place and its people. She specifically dislikes James Blackshaw, who makes constant romantic advances on her despite her lack of interest. The parallel between her relationship with Blackshaw and Sybylla's future relationship with Frank Hawden suggests a solidarity between women of different social classes.

Mr. Goodchum – Mr. Goodchum is a friend of Harold who visits **Caddagat** with him on Sybylla's birthday. He flirts with Sybylla and teases her about turning 17 without having kissed a boy. His presence is a reminder of the growing importance of men and romance in Sybylla's life as she gets older.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Peter M'Swat, Jr. – Peter M'Swat, Jr. is the son of Mr. and Mrs. M'Swat, and he shares his parents' general ignorance. Sybylla notes his lack of etiquette, but she blames it on ignorance rather than rudeness or a lack of manliness.

Miss Blanche Derrick – Miss Blanche Derrick is a guest at **Caddagat**. She is considered the most beautiful woman in Melbourne, and her presence makes Sybylla bitter about her own lack of beauty.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

WOMANHOOD

As Sybylla grows into a young woman, she grapples with what it means to be a woman navigating her social world. She encounters many women over the course of the story, and each of them teach her something about being a woman. Mrs. Melvyn demonstrates refinement and ladylike culture, but she also reveals to Sybylla the dangers of marriage and motherhood when a woman is bound by virtue to a bad husband. Mrs. Bossier teaches Sybylla the behavior and etiquette that 19th-century Australian society expects of women, and her strict moral expectations around Sybylla's relations with men speaks to the deference women are expected to show to men. Aunt Helen, for her part, models nobility and female friendship, as well as the unfortunate weakness of that friendship in the face of external pressures like society's expectations surrounding womanhood and etiquette. Aunt Helen's history with youthful heartbreak also serves as a cautionary tale for the vulnerability of a young woman when she opens herself up to a man in the patriarchal context of 19th-century society. Finally, Mrs. M'Swat represents a womanhood stripped of femininity by poverty and ignorance.

Sybylla's definition of womanhood also constructs itself around her relationships with men. She is scolded by her grandmother for being "immodest and unwomanly" because Mrs. Bossier believes Sybylla has flirted with Frank Hawden, and Aunt Helen also calls flirting "horribly unwomanly." To that end, Sybylla often chastises herself for being unwomanly in her conduct with Harold Beecham––specifically when she is assertive, rude, or violent. Her "latent womanliness" only emerges at the end of the story, when she explains her refusal of Harold's proposal through "sincere and affec[tionate]" language. The repeated use of "unwomanly" to specifically describe Sybylla's conduct with men highlights the fact that women living in her time period and circumstances were expected to conform to a very narrow idea of what it meant to be a woman—a dynamic that Sybylla herself struggles against throughout the novel.

CLASS AND POVERTY

Poverty in *My Brilliant Career* drains the life and spirit from all the characters it affects. By emphasizing the physical and mental toll of poverty, Franklin reveals the tangible hardships of poverty to her middle-class readers. The narrative specifically critiques upper-class perceptions of poverty through the characters at **Caddagat**. Though Mrs. Bossier and the residents of Caddagat provide meals to the homeless men who visit, Sybylla is the only member of the household who feels any real empathy for the them. She views the poverty that afflicts these men as a failure of the nation to protect its citizens, while the other residents of Caddagat believe poverty is a result of laziness. Uncle Julius laughs at Sybylla's suggestion that Caddagat should open employment to the vagrants, exclaiming that work is the "very thing the crawling d[e]vils are terrified they might get." His demonization and dehumanization of the poor reveals that Sybylla's family only helps these people out of a sense of morality, not out of genuine compassion for their fellow human beings. Sybylla later criticizes this mindset, describing the elite class who profits off of traveling workers as "blood-suckers" who profit from "human sweat and blood and souls." With this description, she dehumanizes the rich and explicitly focuses on the humanity of the people whom the rich exploit.

Throughout the novel, even as Sybylla complains of her life as a peasant, she makes clear that she does not disdain the peasant class––in fact, she respects them greatly as the backbone of the nation. However, Sybylla often correlates peasantry with ignorance, which complicates that respect. After she turns down Harold's proposal for the last time, she has "nothing but peasant surroundings and peasant tasks, and [has] encouraged peasant ignorance—ignorance being the mainspring of contentment." Sybylla indicates that the ignorance of peasants is not due to an innate lack of intelligence, but a lack of *access* to education. The connection she draws between ignorance and contentment also suggests that peasants cope with the difficulty of their lives by willfully ignoring information about a better life.

AMBITION, RESPECTABILITY, AND PRIDE

Sybylla is largely characterized by her dreams of a life beyond the one she's living. Her own narration treats her ambition as foolish, but she never stops pursuing her "brilliant career," despite the story's increasing emphasis on the link between ambition and unhappiness. She describes herself as "cursed with a fevered ambition for the utterly unattainable," and the words "cursed" and "fevered" cast

her ambition as something that actively harms Sybylla. On the other hand, her ambition is what allows her to resist convention and remain independent and unmarried. The positive aspects of Sybylla's ambition come from its internal nature––she craves a "brilliant career" for her *own satisfaction*. When ambition collides with concern over reputation, the novel implies, pride and a need for respectability warp that ambition into something distinctly negative.

Most notably, Mr. Melvyn's pride and ambition directly lead to his and his family's financial ruin. He becomes convinced that he is "wasting his talents" in Bruggabrong, only to discover that he has vastly overestimated his abilities. Though Mrs. Melvyn is not ambitious, she shares her husband's preoccupation with appearances and respectability. She and Mr. Melvyn dress their children up as "swells" (or wealthy, fashionable people), making them stand out from the peasant children at the local school. Ironically, this only hurts their reputation, since when Sybylla lives with the M'Swats, the children mock her for the way her family prioritizes fancy clothing over more practical financial decisions. Ambition, respectability, and pride are thus positioned as opposites of practicality. These qualities are also gendered: Sybylla complains that her "boundless" ambition is restrained by her status as a woman, since "it [is] only men who could take the world by its ears and conquer their fate." The down-to-earth Harold, who is repeatedly described as "manly," is able to recoup his family's lost finances, but the dreamy and feminine Sybylla is trapped by the consequences of her father's pride. At the end of the story, Sybylla seems to have lost some of her conviction in her dreams of a better life. She wonders, "What is there in vain ambition? King or slave, we all must die," and she resigns herself to a life of toil. As she accepts this fate, though, Sybylla celebrates the world around her, hinting that learning to let go of her pride might allow her to find contentment in a life without great achievements.

LOVE

Despite Sybylla's independence, she expresses a deep desire to be loved throughout the story. This often manifests due to her insecurities: she frequently calls herself unlovable, to the extent that she believes Harold's affection for her must be false. When she leaves both Possum Gully and **Caddagat**, Sybylla begs Gertie and Aunt Helen to miss her and think of her when she is gone. Gertie's tearful response fills Sybylla with "savage comfort," as Sybylla's desire to be loved outweighs her own love for her sister. She acknowledges that she has not made herself loveable, but she still envies people who have love "lavished upon them without striving for it"––yet, when Harold repeatedly tries to convince Sybylla he loves her, she refuses to believe him. The three characters who Sybylla most explicitly wants to love her––Harold, Gertie, and Helen––are all described as "loveable" at various points throughout the story. Sybylla's repeated use of the word "loveable" emphasizes her belief that love is something that must be earned, which adds greater depth to her insecurities. At the end of the story, however, it is Sybylla who cannot love Harold as he wants her to love him. She recognizes that she has the capacity to love, and she values the love that she has to give too much to settle for Harold. When Harold leaves and Sybylla resumes life at Possum Gully, she espouses her love for her nation, the peasants, the laboring women, and her readers. These alternate forms of love suggest that even if Sybylla never meets a man she can love to her full ability, she can spread that love to other aspects of her life.

MATURITY AND SUFFERING

My Brilliant Career sees Sybylla grow from a little girl to a young woman, and she grapples with maturing before she is ready. Mrs. Bossier and Aunt Helen note that Sybylla is older than her years, and much of that maturity comes the responsibility she has to take on in her family. Once the Melvyns move to Possum Gully, Sybylla's parents fail to treat her as a child. When she brings her drunken father home from town, Sybylla describes an "appall[ing…] spirit" that is "maturing" inside of her. Since it has no one to tend to it, the spirit is becoming "rank and sour." The growth of this "spirit" parallels the cynicism that seems to overtake and ultimately replace Sybylla's childish innocence. Early on in the narrative, as she is coming to terms with life at Possum Gully, Sybylla expresses a longing for a friend "who knew, who had suffered and understood." This desire for someone to ease the burden of her suffering reappears at the end of the novel, when Sybylla realizes she can only ever love a man "who had suffered, who had understood." The hardship of Sybylla's early life has so defined the woman she becomes that she cannot imagine spending her life with someone who does not understand that hardship, thereby suggesting that the feeling of discontent and suffering has unfortunately become central to her idea of what it means to be an adult.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CADDAGAT

Caddagat symbolizes Sybylla's fruitless ambitions. At Caddagat, Sybylla temporarily attains the life she craves: she is surrounded by family who are openly affectionate toward her, fulfilling her desire to be loved, and she has ready access to literature and her grandmother's piano, fulfilling her desire for arts and culture. Caddagat at first seems unambiguously positive––it is a haven for Sybylla after the

struggles of Possum Gully. However, when she is forced to leave Caddagat, the memories of her life there become melancholy because she is unable to return. She begs Mrs. Bossier to rescue her from Barney's Gap and restore her place at Caddagat, but Mrs. Bossier refuses. Not only can Sybylla not reclaim the happiness she once had, but she is actively prevented from doing so by Mrs. Bossier and her old-fashioned values of family. This speaks to how expectations of traditional femininity stand in the way of Sybylla's ambitions. Even when Sybylla is once again among her family at Possum Gully, she cannot go back to Caddagat; instead, her sister Gertie is sent to live with their grandmother, and Sybylla hears of Caddagat only through letters, highlighting her distance from the life she wants to lead. Gertie's letters make clear that the residents of Caddagat have taken to her even more easily than they took to Sybylla, which convinces Sybylla that Gertie has replaced her in the hearts of her relatives. Caddagat has become yet another reminder of the lack of love in Sybylla's life, yet its memory still haunts her because it represents what might have been.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *My Brilliant Career* published in 2007.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ In flowery language, selected from slang used by the station hands, and long words picked up from our visitors, I propounded unanswerable questions which brought blushes to the cheeks of even tough old wine-bibbers. Nothing would induce me to show more respect to an appraiser of the runs than to a boundary-rider, or to a clergyman than a drover. I am the same to this day. My organ of veneration must be flatter than a pancake, because to venerate a person simply for his position I never did or will.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla describes the qualities of herself as a young child that are the foundation of the young woman she will become. She loves words: she eagerly picks up new ones from a variety of sources, whether they're plain-spoken laborers or educated guests. As she matures, Sybylla's love of language will never falter, and her passion for self-expression ultimately leads her to write the story presented in the novel. Further, Sybylla does not distinguish between upper-class and lower-class language in terms of quality or value. This speaks to a democratic and egalitarian perspective on language—she recognizes the differences between these types of language, but she does not view the laborers' syntax as inferior. Sybylla's lack of elitism also comes through in her impertinence. She describes her instinct for respect as "flatter than a pancake," a childish and humorous comparison that highlights the immaturity in her refusal to venerate people for their status. However, her assertion that she is "the same to this day" suggests that an older, wiser Sybylla still sees the merit in judging people based on their character and not their social station.

❝ My mother remonstrated, opined I would be a great unwomanly tomboy. My father poohed the idea.

"Let her alone, Lucy," he said, "let her alone. The rubbishing conventionalities which are the curse of her sex will bother her soon enough."

Related Characters: Sybylla, Mr. Melvyn (speaker), Mrs. Melvyn

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mrs. Melvyn is worried that Sybylla will fail to become a traditional woman. This establishes a conflict between Sybylla and her mother that will run throughout the story. Sybylla instinctually pushes against the restrictions of traditional femininity, while Mrs. Melvyn wholeheartedly believes in the importance of those restrictions. Mr. Melvyn's response shows that women are expected to inevitably conform to societal expectation. He supports Sybylla's youthful adventures, but he does not believe that Sybylla should be allowed to behave in traditionally masculine ways forever. He simply thinks that she deserves some time as a child before dealing with "the rubbishing conventionalities which are the curse of her sex." Mr. Melvyn is aware that being a woman is difficult. He describes womanhood as a "curse" and diminishes the importance of the "conventionalities" or social rules that women must follow by calling them "rubbishing." Despite this enlightened perspective, Mr. Melvyn doesn't see the oppression of women as something that can be overcome, since he believes the conventionalities will "bother" Sybylla "soon enough."

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The fact of the matter was that the heartless harridan, discontent, had laid her claw-like hand upon him. His guests were ever assuring him he was buried and wasted in Timlinbilly's gullies. A man of his intelligence, coupled with his wonderful experience among stock, would, they averred, make a name and fortune for himself dealing or auctioneering if he only liked to try. Richard Melvyn began to think so too, and desired to try. He did try.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mr. Melvyn

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mr. Melvyn decides to leave Bruggabrong and pursue a career in stocks, leading Sybylla to reflect on the nature of ambition. Sybylla describes discontent as a "heartless harridan" with a "claw-like hand." This paints discontent, one of the driving forces behind ambition, as monstrous and predatory. She also sees pride as a factor in ambition. Mr. Melvyn lets his friends convince him that "he was buried and wasted in Timlinbilly's gullies," and he starts to consider himself superior to his surroundings. That feeling of superiority inspires Mr. Melvyn's ambition. The fact that he decides to uproot his whole life based on the assurances of friends also suggests that he is susceptible to the opinions of others. Sybylla later describes herself as sharing the same flaw; this, taken with Sybylla's own ambitious nature, speaks to similarities between Sybylla and her father. This is an early indication that Sybylla's ambition may bring her more pain than pleasure––like her father's dreams, her ambition is the product of discontent and unfounded pride.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Dick Melvyn of Bruggabrong was not recognizable in Dick Melvyn, dairy farmer and cocky of Possum Gully. The former had been a man worthy of the name. The latter was a slave of drink, careless, even dirty and bedraggled in his personal appearance. He disregarded all manners, and had become far more plebeian and common than the most miserable specimen of humanity around him. The support of his family, yet not, its support. The head of his family, yet failing to fulfil the obligations demanded of one in that capacity. He seemed to lose all love and interest in his family, and grew cross and silent, utterly without pride and pluck. Formerly so kind and gentle with animals, now he was the reverse.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mr. Melvyn

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla discusses her father's descent from a gentleman at Bruggabrong to an alcoholic dairy farmer at Possum Gully. His greatest failure, even more than his failure in business, is his failure to fulfill the social roles of a father. Sybylla looks to her parents to define manhood and womanhood, but Mr. Melvyn fails to meet the expectations of manhood. He is "the support of his family, yet not, its support." In other words, the family remains dependent on him as head of the household, but he does not meet that dependence with any actual aid. He "fail[s] to fulfil the obligations demanded of" the man of the house, and Sybylla includes love for his family in those obligations. A man, in her eyes, should not only support his family financially and keep the household in order, but he should also show "love and interest" to those dependent on him. Mr. Melvyn's neglect even extends to the animals in his care, which highlights how much he does not care about those dependent on him. Sybylla's description of Mr. Melvyn as "plebeian and common" also incorporates class into her father's descent. He was once refined and cultured, a "gentleman" in Sybylla's own words, but now he has lost the manners that marked him as upper class and is lower than his fellow dairy farmers. He has lost all "pride and pluck," and Sybylla's attention to this absence suggests that pride and ambition may have some benefits, since they at least enable hope. Without his pride, Mr. Melvyn has nothing to drive him forward.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Hard graft is a great leveller. Household drudgery, woodcutting, milking, and gardening soon roughen the hands and dim the outside polish. When the body is wearied with much toil the desire to cultivate the mind, or the cultivation it has already received, is gradually wiped out. Thus it was with my parents. They had dropped from swelldom to peasantism. They were among and of the peasantry. None of their former acquaintances came within their circle now, for the iron ungodly hand of class distinction has settled surely down upon Australian society—Australia's democracy is only a tradition of the past.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Melvyns face the hardship of labor on their dairy farm. Sybylla's later interactions with her wealthy relatives at Caddagat reveal the contemporary belief that peasants are poor and uncultured due to their own laziness. Sybylla's own experiences with poverty preemptively rebut that claim. Peasants are not lazy––in fact, quite the opposite, as they are too exhausted from their labor to pursue social mobility. Under the oppressive force of this exhaustion, the desire to better oneself is "wiped out," a phrase that suggests a completeness to the destruction of that desire. More than that, toil corrodes "the cultivation [the mind] has already received," so even if peasants attain some education, the weariness of their lifestyle will prevent them from putting it to use. She exemplifies this through her parents, who the reader has come to know and understand as intelligent people of good breeding.

The description of "the iron ungodly hand of class distinction" demonstrates Sybylla's dislike of the class system, which she sees as a hellish force that intercedes on people's lives with the iron fist of a despot. Sybylla argues that the power of Australia's class system undermines the nation's alleged status as a democracy, and her remark that "Australia's democracy is only a tradition of the past" shows that despite her age, she has a steady handle on satire.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Was I mad as mother had said? A fear took possession of me that I might be. I certainly was utterly different to any girl I had seen or known. What was the hot wild spirit which surged within me? Ah, that I might weep! I threw myself on my bed and moaned. Why was I not like other girls? Why was I not like Gertie? Why were not a new dress, everyday work, and an occasional picnic sufficient to fill my mind?

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mrs. Melvyn, Gertie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla agonizes other her mother's frustration with Sybylla's unruly behavior. Her relationship with Mrs. Melvyn is fraught with tension throughout the book, and here Mrs. Melvyn's words lead Sybylla to doubt her own sanity. The fear of madness "took possession" of Sybylla, which positions it as an outside force. The external nature of the fear shows that its source is Mrs. Melvyn, not any genuine recognition of madness. Sybylla also has a difficult relationship with her sister Gertie, whom she loves but is constantly jealous of. This passage makes clear Sybylla's simultaneous dislike of traditional femininity and her insecurity over not fitting it. Sybylla's "hot wild spirit" is more engaging and more powerful than the "new dress, everyday work, and [the] occasional picnic" that she sees as characteristics of traditional femininity. She does not want a life filled with these womanly matters, but she *wants* to want that life.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ As a tiny child I was filled with dreams of the great things I was to do when grown up. My ambition was as boundless as the mighty bush in which I have always lived. As I grew it dawned upon me that I was a girl—the makings of a woman! Only a girl—merely this and nothing more. It came home to me as a great blow that it was only men who could take the world by its ears and conquer their fate, while women, metaphorically speaking, were forced to sit with tied hands and patiently suffer as the waves of fate tossed them hither and thither, battering and bruising without mercy

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla reflects on the gendered aspect of ambition. This is a key way in which her ambition differs from her father's: her ambition is hindered by sexism. When she was a "tiny child," Sybylla had not yet learned of the institutions that prevent women from achieving successful careers. This highlights that these institutions are constructed, not naturally occurring, and people only come to accept them after growing up within the institutions. Sybylla expresses her frustration that she is "a girl––the makings of a woman!" Not only is Sybylla at a disadvantage (in this time period, at least) due to her gender, she has yet to even become a woman proper. She remains a partially-formed girl, the "makings of a woman," set to one day become a woman but not there yet.

Her description of male ambition is aggressive and militaristic, as it drives men to violently "take the world by

its ears" and "conquer their fate" as if it is a battle. Women, on the other hand, are prevented from winning the battle with fate, since they are sent into the fight with "tied hands." Fate is cruel to women, with the language of "battering and bruising" bringing to mind an abusive partner, perhaps to highlight the significance and risks of marriage in a woman's life. Sybylla also emphasizes her patriotism in this passage. She describes her childhood ambition as "boundless as the mighty bush in which I have always lived," reminding the reader of her status as a citizen of the bush and characterizing it as "mighty" and "boundless." *My Brilliant Career* is firmly and proudly an Australian book, and Sybylla is proud to be an Australian.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ This was life as proved by my parents! What right had I to expect any better yield from it? I shut my eyes and shuddered at the possibilities and probabilities of my future. It was for this that my mother had yielded up her youth, freedom, strength; for this she had sacrificed the greatest possession of woman.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mrs. Melvyn, Mr. Melvyn

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla thinks about the miserable lives of her parents after seeing pictures of their younger selves at Caddagat. The contrast between the happy, refined people in the portraits and the hardened laborers of Possum Gully makes Sybylla nervous about the prospect of growing up. She realizes that "life as proved by [her] parents" is a path to eternal toil and discontent. Sybylla has few other role models besides her parents, so the life that they "prove" is the only life she knows. Even if she believes in a better life, she does not feel she has the right to expect it, which speaks to her insecurities. Seeing Mrs. Melvyn as a girl makes Sybylla view her mother as a fellow woman, and she sees Mrs. Melvyn's failed marriage as a grim portent for her own life. Her father's treatment of her mother plays a significant role in Sybylla's dislike of marriage, and that dislike is shaped here. Sybylla believes that Mrs. Melvyn "yielded up her youth, freedom, strength" for the sake of marriage, which highlights Sybylla's opinion that marriage represents a woman giving up her life. For an unhappy marriage to Mr. Melvyn, Mrs. Melvyn "sacrificed the greatest possession of woman." Sybylla does not specify what this possession is: it may be her independence, or her youth; it may also be virginity, which at this time was considered the key to a woman's virtue.

❝ The pleasure, so exquisite as to be almost pain, which I derived from the books, and especially the Australian poets, is beyond description. In the narrow peasant life of Possum Gully I had been deprived of companionship with people of refinement and education who would talk of the things I loved; but, at last here was congeniality, here was companionship.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mrs. Bossier, Aunt Helen

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla finally has the access to literature that she has been craving. Back at Possum Gully, her life was "narrow," a word that represents both the limited mindset that Sybylla found herself in due to the nature of her work and the limited opportunities available to her to pursue her ambitions. At Possum Gully, Sybylla was "deprived" of the friendship of educated people, and the word "deprived" emphasizes that this lack caused Sybylla as much suffering as deprivation of material needs. Caddagat, on the other hand, offers Sybylla the company of cultured people like Mrs. Bossier and Aunt Helen, and beyond that, it offers her literature. In the books of Caddagat, Sybylla finds "congeniality" and "companionship." This description of the books themselves as her friends highlights the importance of literature in her life––it fills an emotional need that is vital for maintaining Sybylla's mental health. Sybylla also emphasizes her love of Australian poets, which calls attention to the work of her countrymen and displays her continuous patriotism.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Career! That is all girls think of now, instead of being good wives and mothers and attending to their homes and doing what God intended. All they think of is gadding about and being fast, and ruining themselves body and soul. And the men are as bad to encourage them.

Related Characters: Mrs. Bossier (speaker), Sybylla, Everard Grey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Bossier complains to Everard Grey about shifting expectations for women. She is a traditional, conservative women, and she believes that the only acceptable roles for women are wife and mother. Her conviction in this belief is intertwined with her religious faith, as she thinks feminine domesticity is "what God intended." Her reference to religion marks how different her thought process is to Sybylla's. Sybylla spends much of the book as an atheist, and unlike Mrs. Bossier, she is very much in favor of women pursuing careers. Sybylla also embodies the "gadding about and being fast" that Mrs. Bossier scorns––she is reckless, curious, and eager to seek out pleasure. Mrs. Bossier presents a model of womanhood that is traditional, domestic, and religious. To Mrs. Bossier, the stakes of that womanhood are high; she believes that breaking these conventions causes women to "ruin[] themselves body and soul." Mrs. Bossier also puts the responsibility of upholding gender roles on men. She accuses Everard of "encourag[ing]" Sybylla's unwomanly ambitions, and states that this kind of encouragement makes men "just as bad" as career-minded women. In this way, Mrs. Bossier depicts gender roles as potentially fragile and in need of maintenance by both men and women. If either group fails to play their part, gender roles might collapse.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Why did not social arrangements allow a man and a maid to be chums—chums as two men or two maids may be to each other, enjoying each other without thought beyond pure platonic friendship? But no; it could not be. I understood the conceit of men. Should I be very affable, I feared Everard Grey would imagine he had made a conquest of me. On the other hand, were I glum he would think the same, and that I was trying to hide my feelings behind a mask of brusquerie.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Everard Grey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla laments the division between men and women. Because society forces the genders to be separate, Sybylla cannot form a friendship with a man without other people assuming romantic intent. Even Everard would likely assume Sybylla wants to pursue him romantically because of what Sybylla attributes to "the conceit of men." There is some humor in this, considering Sybylla has frequently demonstrated her own tendency toward conceitedness, but the vanity Sybylla sees in men centers more around power and domination than her own habit of selfishness. Sybylla fears that Everard will think "he had made a conquest of me." Her use of the word "conquest" recalls her notion that only men can "conquer their fate," continuing her belief that men naturally seek to exert their authority over other people and forces. The fact that Everard might assume he has conquered her whether Sybylla is friendly or cold to him emphasizes the limited options available to women, as she is forced to navigate a course of behavior that avoids encouraging Everard.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ What a great army they were! Hopeless, homeless, aimless, shameless souls, tramping on from north to south, and east to west, never relinquishing their heart-sickening, futile quest for work—some of them so long on the tramp that the ambitions of manhood had been ground out of them, and they wished for nothing more than this. [...] In a wide young country of boundless resources, why is this thing? This question worried me. Our legislators are unable or unwilling to cope with it. They trouble not to be patriots and statesmen. [...] Why does [Australia] not bear sons, men of soul, mind, truth, godliness, and patriotism sufficient to rise and cast off the grim shackles which widen round us day by day?

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99-100

Explanation and Analysis

Sybylla expresses her concern about the many vagrants who pass through Caddagat. She spends a long time discussing and describing these homeless men, and the sheer length and detail of her description demonstrates her respect for each of them as individuals. These men are many in number, and Sybylla describes the overwhelming scale with a long, run-on sentence that moves like the waves of men traveling through Caddagat. Her description of the vagrants as "hopeless, homeless, aimless, shameless" carries

a rhythm and rhyme that is almost poetic, as if Sybylla is lamenting the men's condition through poetry. Considering how much Sybylla loves poetry, that gesture speaks to a great depth of feeling for the travelers. The high population of vagrants also demonstrates the prevalence of poverty in Australia, and Sybylla questions the origin of this poverty. She loves Australia and believes it full of "boundless resources"; yet the legislators betray their nation by allowing poverty to continue unchecked.

Chapter 17 Quotes

Men are clumsy, stupid creatures regarding little things, but in their right place they are wonderful animals. If a buggy was smashed to smithereens, from one of their many mysterious pockets they would produce a knife and some string, and put the wreck into working order in no time.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Harold Beecham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

Sybylla's vehicle is damaged after a race with Harold, and Harold insists on repairing the damage to get Sybylla back home. Before this, the couple was bickering, but now that Sybylla needs help, Harold is eager to offer his aid. This demonstrates Harold's care for Sybylla, and it also highlights that he expresses that care through actions, not words.

As Sybylla muses about Harold's ability to repair the vehicle, she demonstrates her evolving understanding of men. Where once she universally disliked men, now she expresses some appreciation for the skills men have that she does not. She has not changed her belief that "men are clumsy, stupid creatures," but in certain situations she acknowledges that men can be "wonderful animals." She continues to dehumanize men by describing them as "creatures" and "animals" regardless of whether she is referring to them in a positive or negative light. She further demonstrates that she doesn't really understand men by referencing their "mysterious pockets." Sybylla views even men's pockets as "mysterious," displaying her lack of understanding for men's motives and customs.

Chapter 24 Quotes

I had been poor myself, and knew what awaited him in the world. He would find that they who fawned on him most would be first to turn their backs on him now. He would be rudely disillusioned regarding the fables of love and friendship, and would become cynical, bitter, and sceptical of there being any disinterested good in human nature. Suffering the cold heart-weariness of this state myself, I felt anxious at any price to save Harold Beecham from a like fate. It would be a pity to let one so young be embittered in that way.

Related Characters: Sybylla, Harold Beecham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168-169

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla debates whether to remain engaged to Harold after he has lost his fortune. He does not expect Sybylla to keep her commitment to him now that his circumstances have changed, but Sybylla is not so willing to end their engagement without deliberation. Sybylla understands the suffering that poverty brings, and she cares for Harold too much to allow him to suffer alone. She predicts Harold will be betrayed by his friends, become disillusioned with love, and develop bitterness and cynicism about human nature. The certainty with which she describes these things suggests that Sybylla remembers clearly the pain and humiliation her family suffered when Mr. Melvyn lost their fortune. Sybylla recalls the language of "weariness" that she used to describe those early days of dairy farming, describing Harold's fate as "cold heart-weariness." Sybylla does not want to marry Harold, but she is "anxious at any price to save Harold Beecham from a like fate." The phrase "any price" paints marriage as a particularly dire circumstance, but one that is worth the pain to help Harold. Though Sybylla remains opposed to marriage, she sees marrying Harold as a sacrifice she is willing to make so he will not suffer as she has.

Chapter 25 Quotes

[...] the word wife finished me up. I was very fond of Harold—fond to such an extent that had I a fortune I would gladly have given it all to him: I felt capable of giving him a life of servitude, but I loved him—big, manly, lovable, wholesome Harold—from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot he was good in my sight, but lacking in that power over me which would make me desirous of being the mother of his children.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Harold Beecham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 172-173

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla reflects on her reasoning for her continued engagement with Harold. He has given her another opportunity to end the engagement, but instead of breaking up with Harold, Sybylla suggests that the two of them split up for four years and marry after Sybylla turns 21. This passage reveals that she makes this decision largely to push the marriage into the future, rendering it less real. Sybylla does not want to be married: she considers marriage a "life of servitude," which would rob her of her independence and force her to obey her husband. But her love for Harold outweighs that fear of marriage, especially because Sybylla believes Harold is better than she is. He is "loveable," a quality that Sybylla constantly doubts in herself. He is also "manly"––while Sybylla grapples with her definition of womanhood and is frequently chastised by both herself and others for unwomanly behavior, Harold has confidently found his place as a man. Despite these qualities, however, Harold lacks "the power over" Sybylla that would make her want to bear his children. Sybylla's phrasing of Harold's "power over" her suggests that she expects a certain amount of domination from her future husband, but Harold's many good qualities are not enough to convince Sybylla that Harold is capable of controlling her rebellious spirit. His wholesomeness, lovableness, and manliness are not enough to persuade Sybylla into wanting children, which she sees as a vital part of being a wife. This is the first time Sybylla considers becoming mother, which demonstrates her growing definition of womanhood and its roles in society.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ After this auntie and I were to have our three months' holiday in Sydney [...]. Who knows what might happen then? Everard had promised to have my talents tested by good judges. Might it not be possible for me to attain one of my ambitions—enter the musical profession? joyful dream! Might I not be able to yet assist Harold in another way than matrimony?

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Aunt Helen, Everard Grey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla dreams of the excitement that awaits her in Sydney. Even as she deals with her relationship with Harold, her aspirations for a "brilliant career" run strong. Her mind leaps at the possible opportunity to enter show business, and her description of "the musical profession" as a "joyful dream" emphasizes that she still believes that a career as a performer is the key to happiness. She also looks forward to seeing Everard Grey again. At one time, Everard had wanted to marry Sybylla and bring her into a life of show business. That possible path is closed to Sybylla now, and that change highlights the many roads untaken on Sybylla's journey toward maturity.

Everard is not the key male figure in Sybylla's life now––that role has been taken up by Harold. However, Sybylla does not let her fiancé dictate her future. In fact, she does not see their engagement as set in stone. She hopes her "joyful dream" will allow her to "assist Harold in another way than matrimony" by granting her the financial means to help him out of his poverty. This description of assisting Harold positions matrimony as simply one method of assistance, not a culmination of a romantic relationship or even a practical social arrangement. With this description, Sybylla makes clear that she is marrying Harold solely to make him happy and support him through his financial hardship. If she can find an escape from her engagement, she will take it.

Chapter 28 Quotes

❝ Mrs M'Swat was a great, fat, ignorant, pleasant-looking woman, shockingly dirty and untidy. Her tremendous, flabby, stockingless ankles bulged over her unlaced hobnailed boots; her dress was torn and unbuttoned at the throat, displaying one of the dirtiest necks I have seen. It did not seem to worry her that the infant she hold under her arm like a roll of cloth howled killingly, while the other little ones clung to her skirts, attempting to hide their heads in its folds like so many emus.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mrs. M'Swat

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla meets Mrs. M'Swat, the wife of her employer. Sybylla has heard that the M'Swats are ignorant and dirty, and her first impression of Mrs. M'Swat confirms

that fear. Mrs. M'Swat presents a model of womanhood that lacks the refined femininity Sybylla has seen in her female relatives. She is large and fat, which subverts traditional beauty standards and the expectation that women should be physically smaller than men. Her clothes are unfashionable, and they lack the modesty that might have been expected of a woman in the 19th century. Her legs are exposed and "stockingless," and her dress is "unbuttoned at the throat." In addition to her physical appearance, Mrs. M'Swat does not fulfill the traditional expectations for a mother. She holds her crying baby without concern, and she does not reprimand her children for clinging to her skirts. Though Sybylla herself breaks the mold of womanhood, even she is surprised at the model of womanhood that Mrs. M'Swat represents.

Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ There never was any sympathy between my mother and myself. We are too unlike. She is intensely matter-of-fact and practical, possessed of no ambitions or aspirations not capable of being turned into cash value. She is very ladylike, and though containing no spice of either poet or musician, can take a part in conversation on such subjects [...]; but had she been born a peasant, she would have been a peasant, with no longings unattainable in that sphere. She no more understood me than I understand the works of a watch. She looked upon me as a discontented, rebellious, bad child, possessed of evil spirits, which wanted trouncing out of me; and she would have felt that she was sinning had she humoured me in any way, so after cooling I did not blame her for her letters. She was doing her duty according to her lights.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mrs. Melvyn

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

Sybylla has failed to convince her mother to let her leave Barney's Gap. Though she is frustrated at her mother's lack of sympathy, she understands its cause. While Sybylla is constantly pushing against convention, Mrs. Melvyn is a woman dedicated to upholding convention. Sybylla attributes this not to her upbringing, but to who Mrs. Melvyn is as a person. If she had not been born an aristocrat, Mrs. Melvyn would follow the conventions of a peasant and have "no longings unattainable in that sphere." Sybylla, meanwhile, has long been discontent with her life, and she has always entertained unattainable ambitions. She does not portray her perspective as the correct one––in fact, she recognizes that Mrs. Melvyn's way of life is more practical. But Mrs. Melvyn's mindset does not allow her to understand Sybylla, which leads her to treat Sybylla harshly in the hopes of "trouncing out" the "evil spirits" that make Sybylla flout convention. Sybylla's behavior is so far outside the realm of Mrs. Melvyn's understanding that she can only attribute it to evil spirits. On the other hand, while Sybylla is less practical than her mother, she is able to understand her reasoning, which allows Sybylla not to blame Mrs. Melvyn for her letters.

Chapter 31 Quotes

❝ Silence, you ignorant old creature! How dare you have the incomparable impertinence to mention my name in conjunction with that of your boor of a son. Though he were a millionaire I would think his touch contamination. You have fallen through for once if you imagine I go out at night to meet any one—I merely go away to be free for a few minutes from the suffocating atmosphere of your odious home. You must not think that because you have grasped and slaved and got a little money that it makes a gentleman of you; and never you dare to again mention my name in regard to matrimony with any one about here.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mr. M'Swat, Peter M'Swat, Jr.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla is horrified when Mr. M'Swat suggests she has an interest in his son Peter. Sybylla is so taken aback by the suggestion that she explodes in a tirade at Mr. M'Swat, calling him "ignorant" and accusing him of "impertinence." This accusation suggests that Sybylla sees herself as superior to M'Swat in some way, despite the reality that M'Swat has authority over her as her employer. This may be because Sybylla was born with money and M'Swat was not, an idea that is strengthened when Sybylla tells M'Swat that just because he "grasped and slaved and got a little money," he is still not a gentleman. Sybylla is surprisingly disdainful of the hard work through which M'Swat earned his wealth, and she seems to think that wealth is wasted on a man too ignorant to be a gentleman. No amount of money would entice her to marry into the M'Swat family––even if Peter "were a millionaire," she would still be disgusted by him. Sybylla is remarkably honest

and unnecessarily cruel to M'Swat, demonstrating that she has not matured out of her tendency for reckless outbursts.

Chapter 33 Quotes

❝ After Mrs M'Swat it was a rest, a relief, a treat, to hear my mother's cultivated voice, and observe her lady-like and refined figure as she moved about; and, what a palace the place seemed in comparison to Barney's Gap! simply because it was clean, orderly, and bore traces of refinement; for the stamp of indigent circumstances was legibly imprinted upon it, and many things which had been considered "done for" when thirteen months before I had left home, were still in use

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mrs. Melvyn, Mrs. M'Swat

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla returns to Possum Gully after her breakdown at Barney's Gap. Though Mrs. Melvyn greets Sybylla coldly and their relationship is as tense as ever, Sybylla finds her mother's presence a "relief" after spending so much time with the unwomanly Mrs. M'Swat. Her appreciation for Mrs. Melvyn's "cultivated voice" and "lady-like and refined figure" reveals that Sybylla places some value on traditional femininity, despite her constant rebuke of it.

She finds a new appreciation for Possum Gully, as well, even though she previously insisted she would never think of it as home. Her affection for Possum Gully mirrors her love of Caddagat. Sybylla loved her time at Caddagat, and she found it even more beautiful on the days leading up to her departure, since it represented what she could not have. During her stay at Barney's Gap, Possum Gully became similarly unattainable, and she began to long for Possum Gully in a similar way that she longs for Caddagat.

❝ Oh that a preacher might arise and expound from the Book of books a religion with a God, a religion with a heart in it—a Christian religion, which would abolish the cold legend whose centre is respectability, and which rears great buildings in which the rich recline on silken hassocks while the poor perish in the shadow thereof.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla contemplates the nature of Christianity. She challenges the conventional perception of Christianity as a compassionate and charitable religion, and she argues that it is not "a religion with a heart it in." Needless to say, this is a bold claim, since Christianity was even more widespread and influential in the 19th century than it is in the 21st. Sybylla depicts Christianity as a heartless religion that prioritizes "respectability" over human beings. This obsession with respectability is not divine and is in fact deeply human, which can be seen in the many characters throughout the novel who are preoccupied with their reputations. Sybylla also brings Christianity's treatment of the poor into her indictment of religion. She claims that Christianity's emphasis on respectability prompts Christians to focus more on proving their faith with grand structures and displays than they do on the poor citizens dying outside the church doors.

Chapter 36 Quotes

❝ He offered me everything—but control. He was a man who meant all he said. His were no idle promises on the spur of the moment. But no, no, no, no, he was not for me. My love must know, must have suffered, must understand

Related Characters: Sybylla, Harold Beecham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla stands resolute while Harold begs her to commit to their engagement. He is a rich man, and he offers her anything she could want, but more than anything, Sybylla values her own independence. She cannot accept being the property of a man who does not understand her, even if she loves that man and finally believes that he loves her, too. After spending the novel struggling to define her womanhood and searching for someone to love her, Sybylla rejects Harold's offer of marriage, which would cement her status as a woman and prove definitively that she has love in her life. This is not enough for her. She needs to retain her independence. If she is going to marry, she realizes that she her husband "must know, must have suffered, must understand." Harold briefly lost his fortune, but he has

never had to suffer the hardship and indignity of poverty in the way Sybylla has. Because he has not shared in that suffering, Harold can never truly understand where Sybylla is coming from. She cannot accept a man who loves her––she needs a man who understands her, too.

Chapter 37 Quotes

❝ To hot young hearts beating passionately in strong breasts, the sweetest thing is motion.

No, that part of me went beyond my mother's understanding. On the other hand, there was a part of my mother—her brave cheerfulness, her trust in God, her heroic struggle to keep the home together—which went soaring on beyond my understanding, leaving me a coward weakling, grovelling in the dust.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker), Mrs. Melvyn, Mrs. Bossier

Related Themes:

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sybylla again compares herself and her mother, now that she has come into her own version of womanhood. Sybylla is still young, and she still holds the passions that drive her. Her "hot young heart" makes her the type of woman Mrs. Bossier once railed against, who only cares for "gadding about and being fast." By focusing on the differences between herself and her mother at the end of the book, Sybylla highlights the significance of their relationship. Sybylla has had several female role models, but Mrs. Melvyn has been the most consistent and the most present in Sybylla's life. As Sybylla recognizes the ways in which they can never understand each other, she releases her hold on traditional womanhood. Still, she greatly respects her mother and her brand of femininity, and in their shadow, Sybylla is only "a coward weakling." She wishes to understand Mrs. Melvyn and her "heroic struggle," but Sybylla is too much herself.

Chapter 38 Quotes

❝ I am proud that I am an Australian, a daughter of the Southern Cross, a child of the mighty bush. I am thankful I am a peasant, a part of the bone and muscle of my nation, and earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, as man was meant to do. I rejoice I was not born a parasite, one of the blood-suckers who loll on velvet and satin, crushed from the proceeds of human sweat and blood and souls.

Related Characters: Sybylla (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 252

Explanation and Analysis

Sybylla puts aside her self-pity and pessimism and rejoices in her status as an Australian and a peasant. She proclaims herself "a daughter of the Southern Cross, a child of the mighty bush." She champions "the mighty bush," the rural, undeveloped areas of Australia, and she proudly swears her allegiance to her home despite it being unrefined. The Southern Cross has been an important symbol in Australia since the days of its First Nations, and in the 19th century, it became a symbol of Australian democracy. Sybylla speaks to the nature of that democracy, criticizing the upper class's parasitic exploitation of "human sweat and blood and souls." Sybylla pays attention to both the bodies and the spirits of the oppressed working class because she understands how both can be adversely affected by hard labor. In declaring her identity as a peasant and an Australian, Sybylla claims her place as a member of a group. After 21 years of loneliness, Sybylla has found camaraderie in her countrymen and fellow peasants.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER

In late 19th-century Australia, three-year-old Sybylla Melvyn wines in pain. Her father chastises her and calms her down. This is Sybylla's earliest memory. It's a summer afternoon, and her father has brought her in a little brown pillow out to the run (an open stretch of land) to deposit salt. The salt-shed "peep[s] out picturesquely" from the surrounding shrubs, where Sybylla and her father enjoy lunch. After lunch, they prepare to head home. Her father muzzles the dogs and Sybylla picks flowers until she disturbs a snake. Alarmed, Sybylla cries out, and her father drives away the snake with a stock-whip. In the commotion, he drops his pipe. Young Sybylla picks it up, and the embers burn her fingers. This burn, the narrating Sybylla supposes, is why she remembers the incident so vividly, since her father took her on many such outings but this is the only one she recalls.

The novel begins on the Australian landscape, foreshadowing the patriotic pride that runs through the book. Sybylla's story is one specific to her time and place: she is a young woman coming of age at the turn of the century, in an era when progress was consistently fighting against conservatism, and in a country where nationalism is shaping an Australian identity. The description of the salt-shed as picturesque speaks to Sybylla's love for her country, and also to the nostalgia with which Sybylla will come to view her early childhood. Her father carries out his masculine role as protector, allowing Sybylla to explore her surroundings in safety.

Sybylla's father, Richard Melvyn, is a "swell" who inherited 200,000 acres from his grandfather. Her mother, Mrs. Melvyn, is "a full-fledged aristocrat." Mr. Melvyn is known for being hospitable and kind, so the family home, Bruggabrong, is frequently full of guests. Since Bruggabrong is so remote, the house is rarely visited by women, so Sybylla does not know many other women besides her mother.

Sybylla begins her life in the seat of privilege. Her family has access to inherited generational wealth, and her parents are kind and loving. However, despite this charmed life, Sybylla's formative years are spent without the presence of women. This leaves her without a definitive understanding of womanhood, so she spends the novel learning different models of femininity.

Sybylla is "both the terror and the amusement" of her family's guests. She picks up gossip and slang from the adults around her and often poses precocious, inappropriate questions that make visitors blush. She shows no more respect for a land surveyor or clergyman than a laborer, because she refuses to venerate a person simply because of their social status. If the Prince of Wales himself visited, Sybylla would only respect him if he had a personality worth respecting.

Sybylla's penchant for inappropriate questions introduces her unconventionality and her willingness to challenge social norms. Specifically, this section introduces Sybylla's consistent questioning of class status. She does not see the significance of class in defining a person's worth, and her youthful innocence allows her to challenge the notion that wealth automatically demands respect.

At a young age, Sybylla gets her first horse, and by the time she is eight years old she is a gifted rider. Mrs. Melvyn is worried Sybylla is too masculine, but Mr. Melvyn insists that Sybylla should have fun before she has to adhere to the conventional rules of womanhood. Her mother relents, noting that Sybylla should have been a boy. Sybylla continues to ride, ignoring all injuries and feeling no fear. She runs with dogs, climbs trees, drives bullocks, and goes with her father to swim in the stream. Mrs. Melvyn worries for Sybylla's future, but Mr. Melvyn does not treat his daughter as anything but normal. He is Sybylla's "hero, confidant, encyclopedia, mate, and even [her] religion" until she is 10 years old. After she turns 10, Sybylla rejects religion altogether.

Sybylla's lack of traditional femininity clashes with Mrs. Melvyn's expectations. As she pushes against conventions of womanhood, Sybylla comes into her own as a fearless, strong-willed girl. Once again, her unity with Australian flora and wildlife highlights her affection for her homeland. The support Mr. Melvyn shows his daughter is vital to her development, and she worships him for this. However, Sybylla's narration hints that this worship is ultimately damaging: when she loses respect for her father at age 10, it feels as if her devotion to him was so wholehearted that nothing can replace it, leaving Sybylla with nothing to believe in.

CHAPTER 2: AN INTRODUCTION TO POSSUM GULLY

When Sybylla is nearly nine years old, Mr. Melvyn decides that his talents are wasted in the remote Bruggabrong, so he tells Mrs. Melvyn that raising livestock is no longer a financially stable option for the family. that raising livestock is no longer a financially stable option for the family. The truth, as Sybylla sees it, is that Mr. Melvyn has succumbed to discontent and dissatisfaction. He wants to make something of himself.

Mr. Melvyn establishes the story's recurring theme of ambition, and its introduction is distinctly negative. His ambition is explicitly linked with selfishness and vanity––he wants to make something of himself because he feels he is too talented to spend his life at Bruggabrong. The selfishness of Mr. Melvyn's ambition also reveals the patriarchal power he holds over his family. As the head of the household, he has the power to make his wife and children leave their home so he might pursue his goals.

Mr. Melvyn moves the family to a small town near Goulburn called Possum Gully. They arrive in autumn with two servants and just enough furniture to get by until they settle in. The older, narrating Sybylla notes that the family still hadn't bought more furniture 10 years later. The young Sybylla is bitterly disappointed by Possum Gully, which seems "common" and "monotonous" compared to the Timlinbilly Range, and her dislike of her new home never fades. A feature of Possum Gully is its easy access to water, but even that fails to impress Sybylla, since she is used to the many creeks around Bruggabrong.

The promise of new furniture parallels the promise of the new life Mr. Melvyn envisioned––and, like Mr. Melvyn's ambitions, the new furniture never materializes. The move to Possum Gully also disrupts Sybylla's understanding of "home," and she will continue to search for a place that fills her with the sense of belonging she lost after leaving Bruggabrong.

Sybylla feels "cramped" at Possum Gully, and she cries herself to sleep on her first night there out of grief and homesickness for Bruggabrong. Mrs. Melvyn is not much happier, as she is unconvinced that Mr. Melvyn will be able to make a living at Possum Gully. But Mr. Melvyn is optimistic; he plans to make Possum Gully the center of a business in stocks, a business he can enter now that the family lives only 17 miles from the city Goulburn.

Mrs. Melvyn is more sensible than her husband, and she is aware of the many pitfalls in his plan. However, as a woman, she lacks the power to stop Mr. Melvyn from uprooting their family and betting the family fortune on a business he has no experience in. The relocation of the Melvyns to a more urban area also mirrors the shift in Australian culture at this time. Australia, like many other countries, underwent massive and rapid industrialization throughout the 1800s, which led to urbanization and a decrease in demand for rural farmers.

Possum Gully's proximity to others is unfamiliar to the family, who have to get used to living so close to people after spending years in the rural Bruggabrong. Sybylla reflects that having neighbors is convenient when the family needs to borrow something, but she finds it irritating when the neighbors ask to borrow something from the Melvyn family, especially because the loans are rarely returned.

The Melvyns are uncomfortable and out of their element at Possum Gully, which is seen in their discomfort at living so close to other people. Sybylla's sense of humor comes through as she muses about the pros and cons of having neighbors. Her conclusion is that other people are good to have around because they can help her, but they can be a nuisance when they require her help. This comedic selfishness signifies her immaturity.

CHAPTER 3: A LIFELESS LIFE

Possum Gully is "stagnant," like all old rural stations. It is inhabited primarily by married couples and young children, since boys usually leave home when they are old enough. The area's monotony makes the days and years blur together, with the only excitement arising whenever a new resident comes to town. When someone new arrives, all the heads of the local households pay a visit to judge the new neighbors' worthiness for local society. If the new arrivals make a good impression, the neighboring wives will then pay a friendly visit.

The residents of Possum Gully demonstrate predominant cultural norms for both Sybylla and the reader. The fact that only boys leave home when they come of age shows that ambition and career aspirations are gendered notions. The prevalence of gender norms also plays out in the older residents: the women do not welcome the Melvyns until the men judge the family worthy, which reveals how society prioritizes the opinions of men.

After the move to Possum Gully, Mr. Melvyn is frequently away on business, so the responsibility of entertaining the family's many guests falls on Mrs. Melvyn. The men are friendly and respectable, but they are "common bushmen farmers" who bore Sybylla's well-educated mother. She tries to engage her guests with conversations about literature and current events, but her efforts fail, and "pointless" conversations stretch on for hours. The people of Possum Gully, Sybylla reflects, only "talk[] shop," which is not a flaw but does not interest the Melvyns.

Mr. Melvyn's masculine privilege is supposed to allow him to serve as the provider and protector of his family, but Sybylla points out that his absence leaves much of the emotional and social labor to Mrs. Melvyn. Mrs. Melvyn's status as a refined lady of society prevents her from assimilating into Possum Gully, and Sybylla shares her mother's distaste for talking to their neighbors. The description of these conversations as "talking shop" indicates that the citizens of Possum Gully are laborers who mostly discuss their labor, and the Melvyns' refusal to partake in that escalates the class division. Sybylla notes, though, that she does not see the working people of Possum Gully as inferior––she merely sees them as irreconcilably distinct from herself and her family.

Despite her boredom, Mrs. Melvyn makes a good impression on the men of Possum Gully, and soon their wives come to visit with gifts of food. They spend the whole afternoon at the Melvyns' house, talking about domestic subjects that fail to interest Sybylla. When they leave, the women invite the Melvyns to return the visit and ask Mrs. Melvyn to allow her children to play with theirs.

Mrs. Melvyn's ability to entertain guests despite her disinterest speaks to her domestic skills, which are well-honed as a proper, traditional woman. The women of Possum Gully share Mrs. Melvyn's understanding of their gendered role in society, and accordingly restrict their conversation to the home and their children. Sybylla does not share this quality, as her boredom with the local wives demonstrates.

After a month of living in Possum Gully, local law enforcement informs the Melvyns that the children are required to attend school. Mr. Melvyn is in favor of this, but Mrs. Melvyn believes that public school would "ruin" her "darlings." Despite his wife's misgivings, Mr. Melvyn insists that the children go to school. Sybylla and her siblings go to school, where their shoes and frilly dresses give them the reputation of "great swells" among their classmates, who are mostly children of poor farmers. The school is on a hill overgrown with vegetation, and the teacher is an alcoholic.

The debate between Mr. and Mrs. Melvyn once again demonstrates Mr. Melvyn's authority as the man of the house, as he exerts his will over the family. This moment also reiterates Mrs. Melvyn's belief in the importance of class and refinement. She describes her children as "darlings," which infantilizes them and makes them seem too fragile for public education. The notion that public school would "ruin" the children implies that being surrounded by peasants will lower the status of the Melvyn children. The Melvyns' attempts to combat this "ruining" and maintain the family pride leave the children awkwardly separated from their peers with no real benefit. They are dressed as swells, but they still attend the run-down school as the farmers' children.

The neighbors at Possum Gully are friendly. One man, James Blackshaw, is a leader in the community and makes particular effort to befriend the Melvyns. He also has a romantic interest in the Melvyn's servant, Jane Haizelip. Jane dislikes Possum Gully, and she dislikes Mr. Blackshaw even more. She argues with Blackshaw about the monotony of Possum Gully, all the while cleaning and carrying heavy pots as Blackshaw looks on without offering to help. Finally, Jane complains that in Possum Gully the men let their women work too hard. She claims that in Bruggabrong, "the women never had to do no outside work," but in Possum Gully all the women are worn out from labor. Mr. Blackshaw departs, uncertain if he is amused or offended.

Mr. Blackshaw's pursuit of Jane, despite her repeated rejections, represents men's refusal to accept that a woman has declined their advances. Jane provides Sybylla with a model of womanhood that contrasts the aristocratic Mrs. Melvyn. The model of womanhood that centers morality and submissiveness has historically been tied to the upper and middle classes, so Jane's low social status allows her to reject Blackshaw more boldly than Sybylla would be expected to. Jane still acts within a patriarchal system, however, since she is offended that Possum Gully forces its women to undertake "outside work"––that is, work outside the feminine domestic sphere.

CHAPTER 4: A CAREER WHICH SOON CAREERED TO AN END

Though Sybylla, Mrs. Melvyn, and Jane find Possum Gully boring, Mr. Melvyn is enjoying himself in the stock-dealing business. He travels all over the area inspecting livestock, and he gains a good reputation among drovers and auctioneers. Sybylla reflects that a man must have a clear head to work in stock dealing, and he must not be too honorable for the practicalities of business. Mr. Melvyn fails at this; he is too honest and too gentle to be better than second-best.

The disparity between Mr. Melvyn's experience in Possum Gully and the experiences of the women in the family further highlights how female opinions were devalued in the 19th century. Sybylla does not respond to this with as much bitterness as might be expected. In fact, she attributes her father's failure in stock dealing to positive qualities– (honesty and gentleness), hinting that she continues to love him despite the suffering he has inflicted upon the family.

Mr. Melvyn is wrapped up in wanting to be seen as "a socialistic fellow" who treats all men equally, an aspiration that Sybylla characterizes as "vanity." He loses money with every sale, and quickly Mr. Melvyn finds himself close to bankruptcy. He falls into drink, which only worsens his business sense. He mortgages the family property on Possum Gully, but within four or five years he has lost the money from the loan.

While the Melvyns want to be perceived as wealthy and cultured, Mr. Melvyn also wants to project the image of a liberal-minded and democratic man. Sybylla shares similar egalitarian values, but her description of her father's compassion as "vanity" implies that his actions are driven by pride instead of empathy. As he pursues his vanity, he proves that he is incapable of reaching his ambitions. His failure and descent into alcoholism highlights the selfishness of his unrelenting ambition.

Mr. Melvyn finally gives up on stock dealing and decides to live like their neighbors by starting a dairy farm. By this time, Sybylla is 15. She explains that children who grow up milking cows are used to the labor, but because she and her siblings were well into adolescence when they started farming, their hands and arms swell up from the hard and painful work. Mrs. Melvyn is suffering, too, since she has to wake up at two or three o'clock in the morning to churn the butter. The family can no longer afford a servant, so Sybylla's "gentle, refined mother" becomes "thin and careworn, and often cross" from the demands of housework.

The aspect of class inherent in 19th-century womanhood becomes more apparent as Mrs. Melvyn loses the gentleness and refinement that have characterized her as an ideal woman. Sybylla emphasizes the physical effects that dairy farming has on her, her mother, and her siblings, which speaks to the tangible, embodied suffering of poverty. The contemporary audience of the novel would likely have little experience with poverty, and discussing its tangible difficulties rather than philosophical ones forces the reader to acknowledge the day-to-day hardships of being poor.

The Richard Melvyn whom Sybylla knew and loved at Bruggabrong is absent in the dairy-farming Richard Melvyn of Possum Gully. Mr. Melvyn is now a bedraggled alcoholic with no manners, who has lost "all love and interest in his family" and refuses to accept the responsibilities of the head of the household. He was once very kind with animals, but now he is cruel to the cows on the dairy farm.

Mr. Melvyn has lost the qualities that Sybylla will later use to characterize "manliness." Just as she develops an understanding of womanhood, Sybylla discovers models of masculinity, and Mr. Melvyn represents a failure to achieve manhood. He fails to complete the responsibilities expected of the head of the household: he neglects the wife and children dependent on him, he abuses his power over the livestock, and he has lost the refinement that the Melvyns once took pride in.

The only part of life that brings Mr. Melvyn joy is going to town to sell butter, since while he is there he can spend all the earnings on alcohol. Mrs. Melvyn is restricted by "the curse of Eve" from following her husband to town, so Sybylla becomes responsible for following her father and bringing him home.

Sybylla taking responsibility for her father represents a disruption of traditional gender and family roles, as a child is burdened by her father and a woman is in charge of a man. Even in the family's circumstances, Mrs. Melvyn refuses to act against gendered expectations. Her reference to the "curse of Eve" is an allusion to the biblical story of Adam and Eve, the first people created by God in the Judeo-Christian religion. Eve is tempted by a snake to eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge. As punishment, God decrees that Eve, and all women, will be "ruled" by her husband. As a Christian woman, Mrs. Melvyn believes her duty binds her to obey her husband, so she cannot challenge his drinking.

Sybylla muses that if she was more like the person Mrs. Melvyn wanted her to be, she would have respected Mr. Melvyn throughout this time, but she notes, "I am an individual ever doing things I oughtn't at the time I shouldn't." While she brings her father home, Sybylla questions the fifth commandment and her mother's order that she should always honor her parents. Mr. Melvyn being her father does not prevent Sybylla from seeing that he is selfish and weak, and she comes to loathe her father with the uncomplicated passion of a 15-year-old. Despite her anger, Sybylla does not resent her mother, thinking that "a woman is but the helpless tool of man—a creature of circumstances."

Sybylla's playful tone when she admits to "doing things [she] oughtn't" contributes to the comedy of the novel, which often pokes fun at its own protagonist. It also implies that she does not feel great guilt for her unconventional behavior, though she recognizes that she disappoints her mother. Any sympathy Sybylla once held for her father is gone––though her note that her feelings are uncomplicated because of her age implies that she has since gained some nuance in her understanding of her father. She excuses her mother from blame by denying Mrs. Melvyn agency. This suggests that despite Sybylla's personal stubbornness, she sees the systems that oppress women as ultimately insurmountable.

As she and Mr. Melvyn continue home, Sybylla is startled and disconcerted to find that a "grim lonely" feeling is maturing in her. It is like a climbing plant without a pole to grow on: it searches for something to cling to, and without a gardener to prune it, it threatens to rot.

The language of a plant growing into rot parallels how Sybylla's own maturation has been corrupted by poverty and Mr. Melvyn's neglect. The emphasis on her loneliness also foreshadows the search for connection and understanding that Sybylla will embark on as she continues to grow.

CHAPTER 5: DISJOINTED SKETCHES AND GRUMBLES

Sybylla is tasked with caring for young calves taken from their mothers, which she considers a godless and cruel task. She does a lot of thinking while she works, though she sees the "power of thought" as "a heavy curse." The less a person thinks about the reasons of the world and its injustices, the happier they will be, especially if that person is a woman. One of the injustices she thinks about is the sad lot of the calves, which are taken from their mothers and made dependent on the greedy farmers who force that separation.

This section demonstrates Sybylla's strong moral core, but it also reveals that she resents her own code of morality. She simultaneously recognizes the "power" of critical thinking while also criticizing it as a "curse" that weighs heavily on her. Her longing for ignorance strengthens the earlier implication that injustice is ultimately unbreakable, as Sybylla believes that ignorance of injustice is the only path to happiness, instead of believing in combatting injustice. Her sympathy for the motherless calves also echoes the fractured family structure of the Melvyns.

In addition to milking the cows and feeding the calves, Sybylla attends school, cares for her younger siblings, washes dishes, cleans boots, and does her homework. These long days of toil characterize Sybylla's understanding of dairying, which she distinguishes from the refined, pastoral dairy-farming described in agricultural newspapers. The dairying that she has lived and seen is far less glamorous and requires long hours of work with no days off. This hard labor has brought her parents "from swelldom to peasantism," and none of their old friends come to visit. Sybylla blames this in part on the rigid class structure of her contemporary Australia, complaining that "Australia's democracy is only a tradition of the past."

The satire in Sybylla's narration comes to the forefront here as she directly criticizes how class hierarchies in Australia undermine the nation's alleged democracy. She distinguishes between the hard labor of dairying and the refinement of the dairy-farming her audience might have read about. This again forces her readers to contend with their understanding of labor and peasantry.

Sybylla does not mean to disparage peasants, whom she sees as the foundation of all societies, and whose lives are generally honest and good. But she hates the simple life of only work and sleep––her passion for the arts cries out to be fulfilled. She borrows every book in the neighborhood and gives up sleep to read them. The lack of sleep only makes her labor more difficult, but the books give Sybylla an escape from her life. She imagines a life surrounded by artists, and "sweet, cruel, delusive Hope" convinces her that this life is possible.

Sybylla respects the peasant class, but she does not see herself as belonging to that class. She is ambitious and artistic, and she cannot settle for a life of ignorance and labor. As books become her escape, literature establishes its significance in her life, and her love of reading and writing will grow to become a core feature of Sybylla's character. The description of her hope as "sweet, cruel, and delusive" speaks to Sybylla's complex relationship with ambition. Hope grants Sybylla reprieve from her constant boredom, but she believes the promises that hope makes are false and deceptive, and she resents it for that.

Years pass, and Sybylla and her family scrape out a hard-earned livelihood. They take some pride in the honesty and independence of their work, which Sybylla compares to the fortitude of their British ancestors. Despite their efforts, though, 1894 and 1895 bring a drought that renders farming impossible. Sybylla has left school, and she helps Mr. Melvyn and Mrs. Melvyn lift the cows, which is done to help cows who have trouble standing on their own. Even with their combined strength, they need to call in the neighbors to help, and Mr. Melvyn provides favors for the neighbors in turn. Only a few neighbors have the means to send the livestock to a better area, so the farmers of Possum Gully make a trade of helping each other lift their cows.

The virtues that Sybylla sees in her family's work speak to the value she places on the peasants' role in constructing a national identity. By emphasizing the honesty and independence of this kind of work, and comparing the Melvyns' labor to that of Australia's original British colonists, Sybylla reiterates the importance of peasants to Australian society. The notion that peasants are the backbone of society is also seen in the support that the farmers of Possum Gully show each other during the drought.

The drought weighs heavily on Sybylla, her family, and their neighbors. Most dairy farmers love their cows, and to be unable to provide for them is upsetting. Poverty falls upon the Melvyns. They are still too proud to be perceived as poor, so they insist on keeping up appearances; Sybylla thinks this kind of sudden poverty is much worse than inherited poverty, which "is not ashamed of itself" and does not add humiliation to the struggles it inflicts. Sybylla argues against the idea that people can be happy in poverty, since poverty has ostracized her to the friendless outskirts of society, prevented her from accessing the literature and music she longs for, and forced her to undergo hard labor.

Once again, the Melvyns forgo practicality for the sake of family pride. Sybylla draws a connection between her family's focus on reputation and the fact that poverty struck them unexpectedly. She continues her task of complicating her readers' understanding of poverty by describing different types of poverty. Her belief that the Melvyns' version of poverty is "ashamed of itself" depicts shame as intrinsic to their condition of poverty, and she lays out clearly the social, intellectual, and physical hardships that poverty inflicts on peasants.

Sybylla's time at school was uneventful, but she recalls an incident when her teacher, Mr. Harris, challenged the school inspector. The inspector insulted the students, saying they have only "the proverbial stupidity of country people." Harris is an alcoholic and a bad teacher, but he is a good man who loves his students, so he defended them. He told the inspector that the children have to work long hours before and after school, and most of them have to walk several miles just to get to school at all. Harris claimed that if the inspector had to suffer like the children, he would have trouble in the classroom as well. Insulted, the inspector brings Harris out of the room, and that is all Sybylla knows of the event.

Mr. Harris serves to contrast Mr. Melvyn: both struggle with alcohol addiction, and both fail at the roles they are meant to play, but Mr. Harris manages to embody the masculine role of protector despite his personal troubles. He stands up for his students to his direct superior, displaying a level of selflessness that Mr. Melvyn has never exhibited. The inspector's remark about the "stupidity of country people" also reveals the mindset that Sybylla is combatting with her narrative and clarifies why she consistently voices her support for peasants.

Mr. Melvyn interrupts Sybylla's ironing because Blackshaw is coming over to lift the cows. They get five of the six cows on their feet, but the sixth cow is too weak to stand. After a few attempts, the group sits exhausted in the sun. Sybylla thinks about how weariness dominates her life. Mrs. Melvyn is weary, her father is weary, Blackshaw is weary, the cow is weary, Sybylla is weary, the drought-stricken land is weary. She is only 15, but her life and her "brilliant career" amount to nothing but weariness, and as the hard hours age her too quickly, she fears that her life will only ever be weariness. The adults around her had likely had youthful dreams like she has, and now they are only weary. Weariness, she realizes, will probably be the entirety of her life and her career.

Sybylla repeats again and again how weariness dominates the lives of her family and neighbors, and this emphasis challenges the common belief that poor people remain in poverty due to laziness. By showing how exhaustion permeates every aspect of peasant life, Sybylla argues that laborers are not lazy, they are simply worn out by lives of toil. It is amidst her realization of the weariness in her life that Sybylla first begins to worry about her "brilliant career." She has ambitions of independence and brilliance, but she has only weary adults as examples for what adulthood might look like, which makes her dreams seem impossible.


Sybylla hates the summer heat. Life itself seems like a curse to her. The world is only a "great dull hard rock," which all its people are desperately trying to hang onto before it throws them to oblivion. The cow groans, which is unusual for how patient cows normally are. With the "one-sided reasoning" that most 15-year-olds have, Sybylla asks God why he would torture an innocent animal. Sybylla and the others try again to lift the cow, and this time it manages to stand.

Sybylla again disparages her own youthful irrationality. This reminds the reader that she has yet to fully mature and that the ideas she expresses might also be partially formed. Through her lens of teenage misery, Sybylla loses any appreciation for the world around her, deciding that the whole Earth must be as "dull" and "hard" as Possum Gully. However, that belief is challenged as soon as Sybylla voices it, since the collaboration of the farmers gets the cow to stand.

Sybylla and the others return to the house, where Sybylla and Mrs. Melvyn do housework while the men smoke on the veranda before leaving to help another farmer with his cows. The house is stuffy and hot, and Sybylla again thinks that life is a curse. The drought continues, and Sybylla repeats: "Weariness! Weariness!" After all, she reasons, repeating "weariness" is just as wearying as the feeling itself.

The division between the men of Possum Gully and Sybylla and her mother is another instance of the gendered divisions of Sybylla's society. The men relax outside while the women return to the domestic sphere by literally going back inside the house to continue working. Sybylla also acknowledges her own repetition of "weariness," which adds to the novel's self-deprecating humor and demonstrates Sybylla's love and command of words.

CHAPTER 6: REVOLT

Despite the family's efforts, all the Melvyns' cows die. With help from relatives, they are able to pay off their loans, but the agent they pay takes the money and runs. The bailiff repossesses and sells all the family's possessions. The bailiff, however, is sympathetic, and he looks the other way when the Melvyn's relatives send them enough money to buy back their possessions and the neighbors stage a mock sale of the items. Sybylla reflects that the rich can never be certain if their friends truly love them or if the friendship is one of self-interest, but poor people are friends "from pure friendship and love."

Though Sybylla feels isolated and lonely at Possum Gully, the support from the Melvyns' neighbors reveals the importance of community and solidarity among the peasant class. Sybylla's musings about "pure friendship and love" versus self-interest also indicate how the nature of love intrigues her, and how she is careful to distinguish between "pure" love and its disingenuous counterpart.


Through the help of neighbors and relatives, the Melvyns regain their furniture, but they still have no source of income. Mrs. Melvyn tells Sybylla that Mr. Melvyn has no idea how to make a living. Because of this, she says, Sybylla and the older children must go off to work, and the younger children will have to be sent to live with relatives. Sybylla resists, but Mrs. Melvyn says, "You never talk sense," and insists, "my way is always the best in the end."

The tension in the Melvyn household continues to grow, and, as always, the root of the issue is Mr. Melvyn's failure to lead his household. Mrs. Melvyn's dismissal of Sybylla demonstrates the differences between them: Mrs. Melvyn is imminently practical, and she sees her ambitious daughter as without common sense. Mrs. Melvyn's insistence that "[her] way is always the best" implies that Mrs. Melvyn may be as prideful as her husband, but she channels that pride into helping her family and fulfilling her role as a mother.

Sybylla snaps at her mother. Mrs. Melvyn calls her vulgar, but Sybylla says she once foolishly tried to be polite, but her current company is not worth it. She asserts that she will earn her living. Her mother points out that Sybylla lacks the skills for the typical jobs for girls her age. Sybylla believes she has plenty of skills, but she is embarrassed to offer these possible professions to her mother because they are so impractical. At last, she says she could be a musician. Mrs. Melvyn dismisses that idea. They continue to argue, and Mrs. Melvyn exclaims that she is surprised God doesn't strike Sybylla for her insolence. Sybylla cries that she doesn't believe that God exists, or that if He does, He is cruel. Mrs. Melvyn calls her daughter mad and leaves. From outside, Mr. Melvyn shouts at Sybylla and Mrs. Melvyn to be quiet.

The fact that Mrs. Melvyn chides Sybylla for being vulgar shows that Mrs. Melvyn still values a refined, polite model of womanhood. Sybylla seemingly rejects that model, but even as she asserts her desire to forge an independent career, she is embarrassed by the impracticality of her ambitions. Sybylla is characterized by this internal conflict between her prideful ambition and her insecurities, and her struggle to resolve the two exemplifies her journey of maturity. Mr. Melvyn's brief appearance at the end of the scene is a reminder of his selfishness––he has caused most of the family's strife, but he is unwilling to participate in the resulting discussions.

Sybylla thinks Mrs. Melvyn is a good woman, and she thinks herself "not quite all criminality," but the two never get along. Sybylla's younger sister Gertie is the daughter Mrs. Melvyn wants Sybylla to be, but Sybylla believes that she is capable of greater depths of feeling in a single day than Gertie will ever experience. Still, Sybylla wonders if she is mad, because she is so unlike Gertie and the other girls. Gertie wakes up and consoles Sybylla, and her "little love," though "fleeting and fickle," comforts Sybylla.

Sybylla again demonstrates her habit of self-deprecation by describing herself as "not quite all criminality" in comparison to her mother's virtue. She recognizes her own faults, but she refuses to conform to her mother's expectations. Sybylla reveals some disdain for traditional femininity in her remark that the more conventional Gertie cannot feel as deeply as she can. Despite that disparagement, Sybylla envies Gertie and other traditional girls, presenting another internal conflict. Though Sybylla discounts Gertie's love as "little," shallow, and "fleeting and fickle," Gertie's show of affection briefly fulfills Sybylla's desire to be loved.

CHAPTER 7: WAS E'ER A ROSE WITHOUT ITS THORN?

Sybylla wakes up the next morning determined to write a book. She made an attempt two years ago and even sent her work to a publisher, but her manuscript was rejected. The publisher advised her to study literature, and since Sybylla has been unable to do so, she has not tried to write anything substantial since then. Now that she has resolved to write a book, ideas take up all her attention. She stays up late to write, which disrupts her work and makes her weary. Mrs. Melvyn is annoyed and concerned by Sybylla's behavior, but Sybylla is too preoccupied by her writing to care.

Sybylla's perception of literature as a form of escape escalates, and she begins to pursue writing as a path to the "brilliant career" she craves. Mrs. Melvyn's dislike of Sybylla's behavior positions writing as unwomanly, and perhaps as an act of rebellion in and of itself.

In July of 1896, Mrs. Melvyn receives a letter from her mother, Mrs. Bossier, offering to take in Sybylla and prepare her for marriage. Sybylla loves her grandmother, and she is upset but not surprised that Mrs. Melvyn has told Mrs. Bossier about Sybylla's flaws. Mrs. Bossier's letter remarks that Sybylla will need extra time to prepare for marriage because she is very plain looking, which the old-fashioned Mrs. Bossier sees as a cause for concern. Sybylla, on the other hand, sees marriage as "the most horribly tied-down and unfair-to-women existence," and she has no interest in it.

The fact that Mrs. Bossier offers to take in Sybylla specifically to prepare her for marriage highlights the importance of marriage to women in Sybylla's era. Continuing her nonconformist streak, Sybylla disagrees with the significance her mother and grandmother give to marriage. She describes the institution as "tied-down," implying that the responsibilities of a wife would prevent Sybylla from chasing her ambitions, and as "unfair-to-women." Her assertion that marriage oppresses women reminds the reader of Sybylla's understanding of injustice at institutional scale.

Sybylla is excited to go to Mrs. Bossier's home, **Caddagat**, where Sybylla was born. When Gertie comes to act as a peacemaker between Sybylla and Mrs. Melvyn, Sybylla tells Gertie that she is leaving. Gertie starts to cry, which gratifies Sybylla, who is "hungry for love." The tears are more than Sybylla thinks she deserves, since she has always been too self-absorbed to be kind to Gertie, but Gertie will miss Sybylla and her bedtime stories. Sybylla asks Gertie to promise never to forget her, and Gertie promises.

The fact that Mrs. Bossier offers to take in Sybylla specifically to prepare her for marriage highlights the importance of marriage to women in Sybylla's era. Continuing her nonconformist streak, Sybylla disagrees with the significance her mother and grandmother give to marriage. She describes the institution as "tied-down," implying that the responsibilities of a wife would prevent Sybylla from chasing her ambitions, and as "unfair-to-women." Her assertion that marriage oppresses women reminds the reader of Sybylla's understanding of injustice at institutional scale.

Sybylla pauses to reflect on her own nature, in an interlude that she describes as "dull and egotistical," and which she advises the reader to skip. She reveals that she spent childhood full of ambition and was greatly disappointed to realize she is only a girl, since only men can "take the world by its ears and conquer their fate." She gets used to this disappointment, but her precarious peace is broken when Mrs. Bossier's letter makes her realize she is ugly. Beautiful women are allowed to be less than perfect, but "a plain woman will have nothing forgiven her."

Sybylla's self-deprecating humor reaches new heights as she addresses the reader directly. She describes her inner life as "dull" and her inclusion of it in the story as "egotistical"––but this does not stop her from describing her inner life anyway. While she discusses the sexism that inhibits female ambition, her description of male ambition depicts it as overly aggressive: men's ability to "take the world by its ears" comes across as violent, and "conquer[ing] their fate" is militaristic. Her realization of her own lack of beauty is also tinged with comedy, but her claim that beautiful women are granted more privilege than plain women depicts a genuine issue that stems from the societal obsession with female beauty.

Sybylla begins comparing herself to the girls around her. She concludes that these girls are *of* their world, while she is not, but they are ignorant of the world outside their own. This unusual awareness makes Sybylla unsatisfied and restless, and though many people in her life preach the values of mundane life, Sybylla is unconvinced. She refutes a poem about the "tame nobility" of staying at home with a poem of her own about how a pitcher taken out of the house might break but will at least do so in a place of beauty instead of on a dusty shelf.

Sybylla continues to compare herself to people she ostensibly shares status with––first peasants, then women. Now she looks specifically at the farming women of Possum Gully, and again she decides that her ambition and dissatisfaction make her fundamentally different from these women. Sybylla is not interested in the model of womanhood characterized by domestic "tame nobility," a phrase that speaks to the expectation that a woman should be obedient and moral. Sybylla's poem expresses her desire to take risks and explore for the sake of beauty, even at the risk of negative consequences.

Sybylla decides that trying to change herself would be useless, but she does not have the means to break out of the "narrow box" of Possum Gully. She develops an understanding of the world's injustice, and she sees this understanding as a greater burden to a woman than a man.

Sybylla is often plagued by insecurities, but at her core, she doesn't want to change who she is, and she further recognizes that she is too much herself to make that change effectively. She recognizes that she does not fit in at Possum Gully because it is too "narrow" for her, not because of a personal failing, and she is able to broaden that view to encapsulate the various injustices of the world around her. However, Sybylla doesn't believe that any individual can change these injustices (especially not a woman), and this belief makes knowledge of such injustices feel like a burden.

Sybylla curses God for her burdens until she realizes that she does not believe there is a God to curse. Distraught by her own atheism, she asks the Christians around her for advice. She regards this decision as foolish, for they refuse to help her, and the question costs her any respectability. She prays frequently, but she cannot escape the "bitter, hopeless heart-hunger of godlessness." If her father was wealthy, or if Sybylla had friends, she supposes she might have been nicer and more at ease, but since she is poor and alone, she comes to believe that there is no good in the world. "I am," she admits, "sadly lacking in self-reliance," and without support from other people, the 16-year-old Sybylla becomes a cynic and an atheist.

Here, Sybylla satirizes Christian morality. Sybylla wants to find faith, but the Christians around her are too concerned with demonstrating their own piety to care about her crisis of faith. Sybylla's description of godlessness repeats the metaphor of hunger with which she describes her craving for love, which suggests that her atheism is shaped by a similar insecurity to her doubts about love. That insecurity becomes evident when Sybylla confesses to be "sadly lacking in self-reliance," implying that she needs outside support to maintain her faith in goodness.

CHAPTER 8: POSSUM GULLY LEFT BEHIND. HURRAH! HURRAH!

Sybylla sets off to **Caddagat**, which is so rural that even rural residents consider it "up the country." She leaves by train in August 1896, and she delights in the movement of the train. She feels a sense of freedom at leaving Possum Gully; despite having grown up there, she cannot think of it as home. Home, to Sybylla, is Caddagat.

Even though Sybylla has not been to Caddagat since she was an infant, she still considers it more of a home than Possum Gully. This speaks both to her nostalgia for Caddagat and her intense loathing of Possum Gully.

After the train ride, Sybylla is picked up by a coachman who promised Mrs. Bossier that he would take care of her. He brings her to the Woolpack Hotel, where Sybylla gets a letter informing her that her grandmother and aunt are recovering from colds and cannot come to greet Sybylla. The letter tells Sybylla that Frank Hawden, a jackeroo, will take care of her at the hotel. While at the hotel, Sybylla talks to an employee who reveals himself to be Billy Haizelip, the brother of the Melvyn's former servant Jane. Sybylla promises to give her father Billy's regards, and then she leaves with Mr. Hawden.

The wide range of people who Mrs. Bossier has secured to take care of Sybylla reveals Mrs. Bossier's influence over her community. The appearance of Jane Haizelip's brother also serves as a reminder that people's lives continue after they leave Sybylla's field of reference, which mirrors the decreasing self-absorption that comes with growing up.

Frank Hawden chats with Sybylla during the drive. She thinks he is conceited, but she doesn't care because she's in a good mood. She remains polite even when he remarks that he was disappointed to see Sybylla is not pretty. Sybylla apologizes for letting him down, and Mr. Hawden reassures her, "You're not a bad sort, and think a fellow could have great fun with you." Sybylla thanks him and gets him talking about his personal history. While he "gabble[s] away," Sybylla smiles to herself at having worked out Mr. Hawden's character.

Frank Hawden's casual disregard for Sybylla's feelings establishes him as an unkind and ill-mannered man. His focus on Sybylla's appearance also hints at his underlying sexism, and his remark that "a fellow could have great fun with you" further indicates that he does not see Sybylla as a person. Meanwhile, Sybylla demonstrates her social acumen by playing along with Hawden. Even though he attacks her insecurity about her appearance, Sybylla is able to dismiss his rudeness as "gabbling" because she doesn't view his perspective as worthwhile.

Finally, Sybylla arrives at **Caddagat**. She is nervous about how Mrs. Bossier will receive a girl with no money and unpleasant personality, but her grandmother greets her with a hug and ushers her to the fire. Sybylla's Aunt Helen, a quiet and well-bred woman, gives Sybylla a kiss and welcomes her to the home. Sybylla is startled by their kindness, and her cynicism begins to melt.

Sybylla's first impression of Caddagat paints the estate as a utopia. Her relatives show her the unconcealed affection that she craves, and both Mrs. Bossier and Aunt Helen demonstrate the refined womanhood that poverty took from Mrs. Melvyn. The fact that Sybylla's cynicism starts to fade so quickly and so easily suggests that Sybylla wants to see the good in the world, and the luxuries of Caddagat finally allow her to do so.

In the house's dining room, Sybylla sees a portrait of a young girl dressed in white. She thinks it is Aunt Helen, but Helen tells her the portrait is of Mrs. Melvyn just before her marriage. Sybylla looks between this painting and a photograph of her father, which both present her parents as beautiful and refined. She compares this couple with the parents she knows at Possum Gully. This is the only future Sybylla feels she has a right to expect. It was for this future that her mother sacrificed her "youth, freedom, strength."

Once again, marriage is depicted as a sacrifice made by women. Mrs. Melvyn's white dress in the portrait symbolizes her youth and innocence, which she gave up for marriage. The three qualities that Sybylla notes Mrs. Melvyn sacrificing reveal as much about Sybylla's values as they do about her perspective on marriage: she prioritizes her own "youth, freedom, [and] strength" to give them up for a man. The photograph of Mr. Melvyn is a reminder of poverty's degrading effects, and comparing it to Mrs. Melvyn's portraits draws a comparison between the struggles of poverty and the oppression of marriage.

Sybylla goes to the dining room, where Mrs. Bossier inspects her and compliments Sybylla's complexion and hair. The maid rings the dinner bell, and Sybylla goes to dinner with her grandmother, Aunt Helen, Mr. Hawden, and two travelers whom Mrs. Bossier has invited to spend the night at **Caddagat**. After dinner, the group plays music and sings in the drawing-room until Mrs. Bossier tells Sybylla to go to bed. They go up together, and Mrs. Bossier again compliments Sybylla's hair.

Caddagat continues to present itself as a paradise. Sybylla finally has access to art, in the form of music, and her loneliness is sated by the intelligent and cultured company at the estate. Mrs. Bossier's compliments even address Sybylla's insecurity about her appearance, as if Caddagat exists only to help restore Sybylla's lost happiness.

Sybylla lies alone in bed and thinks about her family in Possum Gully. Mr. and Mrs. Melvyn bid her farewell without warmth of affection, and Gertie is the only one who Sybylla believes will miss her. She knows she did not prove herself worthy of her parents' love, but she still loves them, and she fears that even Gertie will not miss her as much as Sybylla would have missed Gertie if their places reversed. Sybylla thinks of her mother laboring at home, and all the love she had for her father as a child, and she wonders why her parents do not love her. She fears she is "ugly and nasty and miserable and useless," with no place in the world.

Sybylla again agonizes over the perceived lack of love in her life, and her lack of worthiness for that love. Her complicated, contradicting feelings toward her parents speak to the confusion of growing up and leaving home for the first time. Each flaw in the list of faults she sees in herself represents one aspect of her insecurity. She is ashamed by her appearance, she regrets not being kind enough to love, she is embarrassed by her own cynicism, and she fears being without a purpose or place.

CHAPTER 9: AUNT HELEN'S RECIPE

Aunt Helen finds Sybylla crying and comes in to comfort her. Sybylla tearfully expresses her troubles to Helen. Helen says that once Sybylla is ready to listen, Helen will respond to her. As Sybylla composes herself, she anticipates the typical advice that life is a trial to prepare the soul for the afterlife. But Helen tells Sybylla that she understands––all people must grapple with being misunderstood. Sybylla's refusal to look for love and good in the world is an act of cowardice. Helen believes Sybylla has a strong character, and if she learns to control herself, she can be loved universally.

Aunt Helen's no-nonsense but compassionate approach to consoling Sybylla contrasts the unsympathetic response Sybylla encountered from the religious community in Possum Gully. She also provides a mature, external perspective on Sybylla's character, allowing the reader to form new opinions of Sybylla with the benefit of some distance. She recognizes that Sybylla fears being misunderstood, and Sybylla herself will not realize how significant that concern is until years later.

Aunt Helen goes on to tell Sybylla that plain looks will not stand in the way of "*friendship* love [...]––the only real love there is." The passion between men and women should not be called love, and Sybylla should not think of it. Then she turns away with a sigh, clearly thinking of her own past. When she was 18, Helen married a man named Colonel Bell. She loved him dearly, but within a year he left her for another woman. On the occasion of a divorce, Sybylla knows, everyone blames the woman, and Helen's life was ruined by the humiliation.

The notion that platonic love is more genuine than romantic love comes as the opinion of a woman scorned by romantic love, but the narrative does not treat Helen's personal history as a reason to doubt this belief. Rather, Helen's advice about love gives Sybylla an alternate perspective on love, which she had formerly seen as a simple yet unobtainable treasure. Helen's history with marriage also provides Sybylla another model of womanhood: a noble, traditional woman whose life was ruined by a man.

Aunt Helen proposes a plan: Sybylla will look in the mirror once now, and then for three or four weeks the mirror will face the wall and Sybylla will not look at her reflection. During this time, Helen promises to make Sybylla "nice-looking." Sybylla agrees. She looks in the mirror and finds herself "a very ugly spectacle," but Aunt Helen reminds Sybylla that she mustn't think of her own appearance at all. With this plan set, Sybylla goes to bed.

In addition to modeling womanhood, Helen demonstrates how Sybylla might find some optimism without losing practicality Instead of reassuring Sybylla that she is not plain, Helen points out that plain looks are not a meaningful flaw, and instead of promising to make Sybylla beautiful, Helen opts for a more neutral phrase: "nice-looking."

The next morning, Sybylla takes in the pleasures of her new room. Her room in Possum Gully lacked even bare necessities, but this one is decorated with lovely furniture, art, toiletries, and a writing desk full of pens and paper. The "gem" of the room is a bookshelf stocked with volumes of Australian poetry and two or three dozen novels. Sybylla sits and reads, lost in the literature, until she is called to breakfast.

The direct comparison to Possum Gully strengthens Caddagat's impression as a haven for Sybylla. She is surrounded by luxury, art, and literature, which fulfill her craving for culture. The fact that the literature she enjoys in this utopia is specifically Australian also speaks to Sybylla's national pride.

To make Sybylla beautiful, Aunt Helen requires her to spend the morning grooming herself instead of reading, to replace Sybylla's "gloomy pessimism" with "healthy girlish vanity." Sybylla obeys for three days but then reverts back to her habit of doing "things [she] oughtn't at the time [she] shouldn't," and she burns her foot in a spilled pot of boiling liquor. This burn, combined with a case of influenza, confines Sybylla to bed. This effectively keeps Sybylla from looking in the mirror. She is not too ill, so she finds being pampered in bed to be quite fun.

Sybylla is once again positioned as different from other girls, as Helen characterizes the vanity about appearance that Sybylla lacks as not only "girlish" but "healthy." Describing a fixation on appearance as "healthy" for young women implies that Sybylla's insecurity about her looks is unhealthy and unfeminine. Helen associates this vanity with grooming, while she associates "gloomy pessimism" with reading. Sybylla has been ashamed of her own pessimism, but this contrast is the first indication that her shame might be due to gendered anti-intellectualism.

The Beechams are the neighbors of the Bossiers, and the other "leaders of swelldom" of the area. The Beechams consist of two maiden ladies (one of whom is close friends with Helen) and their nephew Harold. Harold is much wealthier than the Beechams, and he often comes to bring Sybylla apples while she is bedridden. Helen teases Sybylla about Harold's flirtatious intentions, and Sybylla retorts that if Harold knew she was ugly, he would lose interest.

Sybylla's response to Harold bringing her apples establishes the dynamic between them that will continue through the rest of the book. He pursues her with kindness and flirtation, while Sybylla rejects the possibility that Harold could truly care for her.

While in bed, Sybylla spends hours reading. Books bring her great pleasure, especially those of Australian poetry. They replace the loneliness of Possum Gully with a sense of companionship. The world around her, with all its features and mysteries, has "written a tale on [the writers'] hearts as had been written on [hers]." In the piece of her heart where she hides youthful dreams, she puts the hope that one day she will meet these writers as a peer.

Sybylla often downplays her fascination with the world around her in favor of complaining about farm work or worrying about her womanhood. However, this section makes clear that, despite her cynicism and self-interest, Sybylla is deeply intrigued by the world outside herself. She describes the world as writing a tale on her heart. This locates that tale right next to her personal ambitions, since she immediately goes on to describe her aspirations of writing as living in a piece of her heart. Positioning these two feelings so close together emphasizes the significance of both.

CHAPTER 10: EVERARD GREY

Sybylla's Uncle Julius is set to return from Sydney to **Caddagat** in September, and he will be bringing with him a young gentleman named Everard Grey. Grey is the orphaned son of English aristocrats, who had his fortune stolen by distant relatives. Mrs. Bossier found and educated him, and she now considers Grey her adopted son. Sybylla has recovered from her illness and injury, and when Julius and Grey arrive in the evening, Sybylla will be allowed her first look in the mirror.

Julius and Everard's impending arrival marks the first appearance of men besides Frank Hawden at Caddagat. Everard Grey's life story is dramatic and reads almost like a storybook, in contrast to Sybylla's own life, which she considers dull.

On the afternoon before Uncle Julius and Everard Grey arrive, Mrs. Bossier sends Sybylla on an errand. Frank Hawden decides to accompany her, which annoys Sybylla because her grandmother has warned her against encouraging young men. Mr. Hawden's dislike of Sybylla has turned to infatuation, and he claims that he likes her even though she isn't pretty. Sybylla attributes his feelings to the fact that she is the only young woman present and Hawden is of an age when young men lust after any woman they see.

Though Sybylla remains unconventional and strong-willed, Mrs. Bossier's influence on her is evident in Sybylla's reluctance to be alone with a young man. This instinct proves correct when Hawden launches his unrequited pursuit of Sybylla. Additionally, Sybylla's belief that she is unlovable returns, as she refuses to believe that Hawden might like her for any reason beyond lust.

Hawden and Sybylla return late in the afternoon, so Sybylla is only half-dressed when Uncle Julius arrives, and she can't greet him until dinner. Aunt Helen helps Sybylla dress for dinner, and Sybylla reflects that evening wear is "one of the prettiest and most idiotic customs extant." After she dresses, Sybylla joins Helen and Mrs. Bossier in the drawing-room, which Uncle Julius has had illuminated much more brightly than Sybylla is used to.

Sybylla's quip about evening wear being a "pretty" and "idiotic" custom represents her mixed feelings on the customs of femininity. The change in lighting in the drawing-room is also symbolic: Caddagat is not a utopia impervious to change, but a regular (if lavish) estate. The fact that Julius is the one to change the lighting also demonstrates his power as a man––where Caddagat was once governed by women, now that a man has arrived, he has dominion over the house.

Aunt Helen gives Sybylla a hand-mirror, and Sybylla sees her reflection for the first time since her arrival. She is surprised to see that, while her face is still plain, Aunt Helen has styled her hair and dress to call attention to Sybylla's attractive figure. Even her face is so alight with joy and youth that Sybylla no longer thinks herself ugly. Sybylla asks Aunt Helen to confirm that she is not "completely hideous," and Aunt Helen tells her that no one could call Sybylla ugly, or even plain. She takes Sybylla's face in her hands and says, "brilliant is the word which best describes you."

Aunt Helen has been the character who best understands Sybylla, which adds credibility and meaning to her validation of Sybylla's desire to be "brilliant." Helen is always sensible, and the fact that she sees brilliance in Sybylla implies that Sybylla's ambitions are perhaps not as impractical as she thinks.

Uncle Julius comes in for dinner. He is well-respected in all surrounding areas as generous and jolly, and Sybylla is proud to call him uncle. He greets Sybylla with a hug and an exclamation of how nice she looks. Aunt Helen introduces Sybylla to Everard Grey. Everard looks at Sybylla with an admiration that sparks a feeling she has never felt before. He asks if he may greet her with a kiss, and she says he can kiss if he catches her. Everard chases Sybylla around the garden until she starts laughing and Everard catches up to her. He gives her a kiss, and they return to the family on the veranda––Everard is "in triumph," and Sybylla is "very red and uncomfortable."

Sybylla continues to mature as she has her first encounter with a young man her age. The unfamiliar feeling that results from his admiration hints that Sybylla might have burgeoning romantic or sexual urges, despite her dislike of marriage. Everard and Sybylla's playful chase around the garden, however, shows that they have not entirely outgrown their childishness. Their contrasting reactions to the kiss also highlight the double standards surrounding romance for men and women. Everard emerges "in triumph," viewing his successful chase of Sybylla as a conquest, while Sybylla expresses in simple, humble language that the situation has made her uncomfortable.

Mrs. Bossier arrives at the veranda. She looks at Sybylla disapprovingly, but Uncle Julius reminds his mother that she herself kissed boys in her youth, and Mrs. Bossier relents with a smile. Everard remarks to Aunt Helen that Sybylla is very excitable, and he is surprised when Helen tells him that Sybylla thinks herself plain-looking. During dinner, Sybylla examines Everard's appearance, and she notes he has the "cold rather heartless expression" common of the English aristocracy.

The revelation that Mrs. Bossier was less conservative in her youth indicates the expected transition from girl to woman in the 19th century. Young girls and boys have more freedom in their interactions than men and women. Additionally, Everard's surprise that Sybylla dislikes her appearance suggests that her insecurities are not grounded in fact. Sybylla's interest in class also reappears here––she characterizes the English aristocracy as "cold" and "heartless," signifying a lack of humanity associated with both aristocrats and Englishmen.

After dinner, the family sings together. Everard Grey has a well-trained baritone and plays the piano with skill. Uncle Julius encourages Sybylla to sing. She resists––she likes to sing, but only when no one can hear her. Julius insists, however, so Sybylla sings an old song called "Three Fishers Went Sailing." Everard accompanies her on piano, and his playing lets her forget her audience and sing comfortably. After her performance, Everard enthusiastically compliments Sybylla's voice. He is educated in the arts, and his praise excites Sybylla. She wonders if she could truly become a singer.

"Three Fishers Went Sailing," also known as simply "Three Fishers," is a song adapted from a poem written in the mid-19th century. Perhaps its most famous line is, "Men must work, and women must weep." This speaks to the themes of gender division and labor that run throughout the novel. The fact that Sybylla and Mrs. Melvyn bear most of the responsibility for the Melvyn family seems to contradict the song's assertion of female helplessness.

After the song, Everard and Uncle Julius encourage Sybylla to continue performing, so she recites a poem and dresses up as "a fat old Irish woman" to perform a comedy routine. Everard continues to compliment her. He wants to bring her to Sydney and have her properly trained, and though Uncle Julius shuts down that idea, Sybylla is very pleased with herself.

In her excitement at Everard's praise, Sybylla once again demonstrates her desire for affirmation and her susceptibility to others' opinions. His proposal of training Sybylla to perform also adds plausibility and possible action to Sybylla's hope for a career in the arts, bringing Sybylla's ambitions into sharper focus.

CHAPTER 11: YAH!

The next morning, Sybylla scolds herself in the mirror for thinking herself so interesting. She is humiliated at having accepted Everard's flattery, and she resolves to refute any more compliments he might pay her. She reminds herself that she is "ugly and useless," which is a routine that has replaced her morning prayers.

Sybylla alternates rapidly between inflated and deflated self-worth. She convinces herself that Everard's interest in her is not genuine, and she reiterates that she is "ugly and useless." The repetition of the same insults every time Sybylla lapses into self-loathing signifies the cyclical nature of such feelings. The extent to which she reminds herself of her low worth is another instance of self-deprecating humor; however, the fact that she insults herself instead of praying shows that she still wrestles with her crisis of faith.

At breakfast, Everard tells Mrs. Bossier that she is robbing the world of an artist by preventing Sybylla from traveling to Sydney to be trained as a performer. He even offers to pay the expense himself. Mrs. Bossier considers performers immoral and unrespectable, and she insists that Sybylla will never be "a bold bad actress." Sybylla agrees that she will never be a bold bad actress, putting special emphasis on the adjectives rather than the word actress itself. Everard tries to convince Mrs. Bossier that Sybylla could have a "brilliant career" on the stage, but Mrs. Bossier scoffs that girls should not think of careers and should focus on marriage and motherhood. Everard presses the issue, but Mrs. Bossier puts her foot down. Finally, though, she says that Sybylla may take a trip to Sydney with Aunt Helen and Everard in the autumn.

Sybylla demonstrates her cleverness, humor, and penchant for wordplay by emphasizing that she will never be a "bold bad actress." This emphasis implies that she might become a good actress, and it allows Sybylla to keep that dream alive without lying to her grandmother. Here, Mrs. Bossier also establishes the pillars of her model of womanhood. She has high moral standards, and her age and aristocratic status grant her authority that other women may not have. She refuses Everard's wish to bring Sybylla to Sydney, even though as a high-born man Everard might be expected to wield more power in the situation. However, although Mrs. Bossier herself has power, she is a firm believer in traditional, domestic womanhood.

Sybylla and Everard spend more time together. She appreciates the company of a well-bred gentleman with knowledge of culture. When Everard once again compliments her, however, Sybylla gives him a sarcastic bow and thanks him for amusing himself with "a little country bumpkin." She runs off to her room, ignoring Everard calling after her. Sybylla knows she is ugly, and she doesn't want anyone to "perjure his soul" by pretending otherwise. She mopes until the smell of flowers by the garden tempt her outside, and she gathers several blossoms to decorate her room.

Sybylla's description of herself as a "country bumpkin" reveals that her respect for peasants does not stop her from being insecure about her own poverty. Her insecurities consistently prevent her from gaining what she wants, whether that be love or the company of cultured people. The religious and legal language of Everard "perjuring his soul" in calling her pretty raises the stakes of her unhappiness to melodramatic degrees, highlighting the irrationality of Sybylla's teenage angst.

While she arranges the flowers in vases, she overhears Everard Grey talking with Aunt Helen. She admits that a "heroine of a story" might have run away or covered her ears to prevent herself from eavesdropping, but Sybylla remains and listens to their conversation. Everard complains about Mrs. Bossier's resistance to bringing Sybylla into show business. He believes that Sybylla would succeed, and he could protect her from scandal by marrying. Helen warns Everard not to be rash, since he is known to be something of a fickle ladies' man, and Helen does not want Sybylla to have her heart broken and grow into a cynic. She tells Everard to hide his attraction to Sybylla for the rest of his stay at **Caddagat**.

Sybylla again distinguishes herself from other (more respectable) women by acknowledging that her actions are not those of a "heroine." She is extensively well-read, and she knows the behavior her readers are accustomed to in their protagonists. Nevertheless, Sybylla is writing her own story, and she represents herself as a real person rather than an idealized heroine. Helen's concern about a romance between Everard and Sybylla likely stems from her own tragic experiences with romance, and her desire that Sybylla avoid cynicism repeats the notion that a woman should not be a pessimist. Meanwhile, Everard's ready willingness to marry Sybylla demonstrates his own youthful impulsiveness, but also his perspective of marriage as a tool to manage social status.

Sybylla leaves their conversation, offended that Aunt Helen considers her a child who will fall in love with every man she sees. She cries aloud, "I hate and detest men!" Hawden overhears her, and he tells her it is his right to pursue Sybylla romantically. Sybylla agrees, but she tells Hawden it is also *her* right to reject those pursuits.

Sybylla's frustration with men and her distrust of marriage have escalated to a dislike of all men. Frank Hawden does nothing to dissuade this negative opinion––his assertion that he has a right to pursue Sybylla demeans her and makes clear that he sees her as a prize instead of a person. Sybylla refutes Hawden not by challenging his right to make advances, but by declaring that she also has rights.

Sybylla leaves Hawden. She goes to play piano, but she is interrupted by Everard, who asks her to sing for him. She runs away from him, only to again be confronted by Mr. Hawden. He apologizes to her, and when she rejects his apology, Hawden confesses that he loves her. Sybylla is unmoved, and declares that there is no such thing as love. Hawden tries to argue, but Sybylla only mocks him. He tells her she will reject her treatment of him, but she laughs off his anger and departs.

The rapid sequence of Sybylla fleeing the two men who are interested in marrying her indicates how patriarchal expectations can make women feel trapped and desperate. Driven by this discomfort, and her own insecurities, Sybylla draws this conclusion that love does not exist. Her rejection of Hawden's apology marks a shift in their relationship, as Hawden humanizes himself only to be faced with ridicule.

CHAPTER 12: ONE GRAND PASSION

Sybylla avoids any more private conversations with Everard Grey until one morning on the veranda. He expresses his desire to be better friends, and though Sybylla desperately wants to be his friend, she understands that "the conceit of men" would make Everard think he has conquered her if she accepts his friendship. She spurns him, and Everard leaves her, irritated.

Sybylla's experiences with vain, entitled men like her father and Frank Hawden have shaped her belief that men are inherently conceited. Her fear that Everard will think he's conquered her also recalls their chase through the garden, when Everard won a kiss in triumph and Sybylla was left defeated and uncomfortable. Her conviction to maintaining her independence and dignity drives her to reject one of her greatest desires, a true friend with an understanding of arts and culture.

Two days later, Everard and Uncle Julius leave **Caddagat** for Sydney. Hawden tells Sybylla that he is glad the "dandified ape" is gone, since now Sybylla will pay more attention to him. Hawden will come into property in England when he is 24, and he asks Sybylla to come with him there. Sybylla is so startled by the idea of marrying Hawden that she starts laughing. She calls Hawden "a boy, a child," who falls in love twice a week, and to whom marriage would be a farce. Hawden is insulted and grabs Sybylla by the wrist. She punches him in the nose and runs off, while Hawden roars that she will hear more from him. She acknowledges that her ferocity is her own fault, but she calls back to Hawden that a child who takes up man's tools will always cut himself.

Hawden's description of Everard as a "dandified ape" highlights the differences between the two men in class and culture. It also underscores Hawden's complete misunderstanding of Sybylla's character, as the refinement that made Everard "dandified" is precisely what she likes about him. His obvious disdain for culture is an additional reason why Sybylla laughs at his proposal of marriage. When she calls him a "boy," she makes clear that she does not think of Hawden as a man. Her parting comment to him emphasizes this, as she implies to Hawden that a child like him will only embarrass himself if he tries to act like a man.

Later, Mr. Hawden tells Mrs. Bossier that Sybylla has been flirting with him. Mrs. Bossier scolds Sybylla for her immodesty and adds that Hawden has asked for permission to marry Sybylla. Mrs. Bossier says the choice is up to Sybylla, but Sybylla is so offended by the idea that she breaks down in angry tears, ranting to Mrs. Bossier about how much she hates Hawden. She knows her grandmother thinks any man with stable finances is a good match, but Sybylla wants to lead a life "independent of the degradation of marriage." She tells her grandmother that she never flirted with Hawden, and Mrs. Bossier puts the matter to rest.

Hawden's attempted manipulation shows how entitled he feels to Sybylla's affection. It also demonstrates that despite his lack of education, Hawden is keenly aware of the social systems he operates in, and he knows how to use his male privilege to his advantage. Mrs. Bossier's conception of marriage also characterizes her awareness of social systems, as she sees marriage as a social and economic maneuver for women to secure a stable life. Sybylla, on the other hand, views marriage as a "degradation." This recalls how she has witnessed her mother degrade from a refined aristocrat to a weary dairy farmer. Once again, Sybylla asserts her intent to remain independent of marriage.

Sybylla finds Mr. Hawden and demands he stop plaguing her with declarations of love. She tells him that often she does not believe in love, and when she does, she thinks it too sacred to desecrate with a boy like Hawden. She adds that she did not want to be so harsh with him, but his treatment of her has driven her to it. This fails to stop Hawden's pursuit of Sybylla, and in fact afterwards he follows her all over **Caddagat** complaining about her abuse of him. Despite this annoyance, Caddagat is so beautiful in the springtime that Sybylla barely minds Hawden.

Sybylla admits that her understanding of love is more complex than simply not believing in it, and she acknowledges that her opinion on love changes frequently. Sybylla's desperation to be loved emerges as she confesses that she thinks love is sacred, implying that her insecurities about her worthiness to achieve that sacrament drives her to deny love's existence entirely. This moment of vulnerability does not prevent her from insulting Hawden, however, and she again dismisses his manhood by calling him a boy. The beauty of Caddagat distracts her from Hawden, continuing Caddagat's role as a sanctuary for Sybylla.

CHAPTER 13: HE

Sybylla introduces this chapter as an account of her first, last, and only real sweetheart. When she first meets her lover, she has been collecting ferns, and she looks "quite the reverse of a heroine" in work clothes with a mess of tangled hair. While she is picking lemons for Aunt Helen, a pair of hands wrap around her waist and carry her down from the ladder. The young man is tall and handsome, though not remarkable, and Sybylla guesses he must be her neighbor Harold Beecham.

Sybylla again acknowledges that she does not fit the archetype of a heroine––in fact, she is "the reverse" of a heroine. She implies that heroines do not wear work clothes or have unkempt hair. This underscores how Sybylla prioritizes independence over beauty, and suggests that the role of "heroine" is associated with the upper class.

Harold Beecham mistakes Sybylla for a serving-girl, and she decides to go along with the confusion. He teasingly asks her to kiss him before showing off with his stock-whip. He whips the air around her, but he is so skilled with it that Sybylla trusts him to keep her safe. Harold is impressed at her lack of fear.

Harold's first impression of Sybylla is one of mistaken identity. Sybylla has expressed, and will continue to express throughout the novel, that she needs the person who loves her to truly understand her. The fact that Harold fails to meet that criteria on his and Sybylla's first meeting hints that romance with him might not give Sybylla what she wants. He is impressed by Sybylla's courage when he whips the air, but Sybylla attributes her lack of fear to Harold's skill with the whip. Their differing interpretations of Sybylla's reaction shows that Harold is more willing to give Sybylla credit for her own abilities than Sybylla herself.

Later, Mrs. Bossier tells Sybylla that Harold Beecham is visiting, and she sends Sybylla to entertain him. She dresses in evening-wear and greets Harold. When they meet, she laughs, because despite Harold's "sex, size, and importance," Sybylla has all the power in this situation. Harold recognizes her and blushes, and he tries to apologize for his conduct by the lemon tree. This only makes Sybylla laugh more.

Sybylla's assessment of Harold's advantages highlights the different aspects of power and privilege. Not only is Harold male, but he is wealthy and influential. He also is more physically imposing than Sybylla, and bringing up that point moves these privileges from abstract concepts to tangible realities. Despite Harold's advantages, Sybylla has taken control of their encounter by surprising him with her true identity.

Sybylla and Harold tease each other. When Sybylla mentions Uncle Julius is bringing a judge home for dinner, Harold says he cannot dine with a judge in his work clothes. Sybylla reassures him that men don't notice clothes and adds that he will look fine after she brushes him down. Harold counters that he has already brushed himself, but Sybylla says he's done a poor job. She complains that men are "the uselessest, good-for-nothingest, clumsiest animals in the world," who are only good to smoke and swear.

Considering how much Sybylla values intelligence and culture, her description of men as "animals" indicates that she does not believe any man could live up to her standards for refinement. Her characterization of men as "useless" and "good-for-nothing" also echoes her own insecurities, as she often chides herself for being useless. This hints that some of Sybylla's dislike of men stems from her personal insecurity. The incorrect grammar of the words "uselessest" and "good-for-nothingest" adds a level of childishness and naivete to Sybylla's complaint.

Sybylla and Harold walk through the garden together, where they encounter a horse by the fence. When Sybylla approaches the animal, it startles and damages its bridle. She fetches a hammer to try to repair the damage, but she fails. Harold mends it for her, laughing that "the helplessest, uselessest, troublesomest little creatures in the world" who are only good to torment men. This makes Sybylla laugh.

Harold's good-natured retort to Sybylla's remark about men mimics the language she used against him. The specificity of his repetition demonstrates that he listens to Sybylla and takes into account the specific words she uses. He does not respond to Sybylla's teasing with offense, but uses it as an opportunity to respond with a similar joke, revealing that he and Sybylla share a similar sense of humor. Harold's response to Sybylla's quip is also delayed––he waits until the right moment to speak. This suggests that he is able to restrain himself better than the outspoken Sybylla.

Uncle Julius comes home, and when Harold goes to greet him, Sybylla talks to Aunt Helen. This conversation prompts Sybylla to realize that Harold is quieter than most men and content to listen while she does all the talking. Julius and Mrs. Bossier take up Harold's attention during dinner, so Sybylla reads through the meal, only looking up occasionally to smile at Harold. The next morning, Julius gives Harold the pair of bullocks that Harold came to **Caddagat** for, but Harold lingers at the house to speak with Sybylla. This outrages Julius; he considered Harold to be too sensible to be distracted by women, which Julius sees as "the ruination of all men." Harold pays no mind to Julius's judgment. He comes to visit again a few days later, and Sybylla marvels at his silence––it is "fearful," "wonderful," and "intelligent."

Just as Mrs. Bossier provides a contrast to Sybylla's untraditional womanhood, Uncle Julius acts as the conventional older man to Harold's youth. He lacks Harold's respect for women, and his remark that women are "the ruination of all men" is a broad, universalizing, and disparaging statement. However, Harold ignores the advice of his elder and continues to pursue Sybylla. Her description of his silence shows the appeal that Harold offers. His willingness to listen to her is "wonderful" and surprising, and he displays the intelligence that she craves in a partner. And though he is less emotional than Sybylla, the "fearful" nature of his silence provides Sybylla some of the passion that his words do not.

CHAPTER 14: PRINCIPALLY LETTERS

Sybylla writes to her sister Gertie, revealing she has tried to write seven letters prior but keeps getting distracted. She tells Gertie about the kindness of Mrs. Bossier, Aunt Helen, and Uncle Julius, and wishes Gertie could hear the beauty of the piano. She asks if Possum Gully has seen rain, since **Caddagat** is facing a drought––though it is nothing like the droughts the Melvyns suffered near Goulburn. She describes her grandmother's house as "the dearest old place in the world" and tells Gertie about her feelings for Harold Beecham. Harold is her favorite of the men around her, and she emphasizes that the area has more men than she's ever seen in one place. She tells Gertie to think of her, adding that she is "just as ugly as ever." She closes her letter again asking Gertie to remember her.

The way Sybylla gushes about Caddagat highlights how much she sees the estate as a paradise. Even when it faces difficulties, like a drought, Sybylla perceives those difficulties as superior to those at Possum Gully. Sybylla's requests that Gertie remember her also continue Sybylla's tendency to seek love from Gertie. The lack of confidence apparent in Sybylla's craving for love is made more apparent by her claim that she is "just as ugly as ever." Even though Aunt Helen has helped Sybylla like her appearance more, Sybylla still feels the need to emphasize her ugliness.

Sybylla writes another letter, this time to Everard Grey. She thanks him for the books and magazines he sent her and supposes he has forgotten all about the family at **Caddagat** after so long away. She anxiously awaits her visit to Sydney, where she plans to keep Everard and Aunt Helen dancing all night and all day. She wants to see everything in the city and to learn all of Sydney's truths. Here, Sybylla stops writing, realizing the sentimentality of her letter would cause Everard to call her a fool. She tears up the letter and burns it in the fire, replacing it with a formal thank-you letter for the books and magazines. Everard never replies to this letter, though he writes to Mrs. Bossier about how busy he is and how much he travels.

Sybylla's insecurities usually manifest as a dislike of her personal qualities: her appearance, her ambition, and her perceived uselessness. However, as she begins to mature and spend time with new people, particularly men, Sybylla's insecurities extend to her social skills. Everard has sent Sybylla literature, which demonstrates an understanding of Sybylla's passions and a genuine care for her. Sybylla refuses to accept that care, and instead chooses to believe that Everard would spurn her for being open with him. The opposite proves to be true, as Everard stops investing his energy in Sybylla when she responds to him without emotion.

Sybylla has a few chores at **Caddagat**, one of which is to extend hospitality to visiting vagrants. Anyone who comes to Caddagat is offered food free of charge. The house sees about 50 men every week, all "hopeless, homeless, aimless, shameless" as they seek work. These men are a diverse group, and in some of them Sybylla detects a resentment of the Bossiers' wealth. She takes this to mean that these men have failed in their lives and hate to see others succeed.

Mrs. Bossier's charity to the vagrants initially seems like another aspect of the utopic perception Sybylla has of Caddagat. The number and diversity of the vagrants speaks to the prevalence of poverty in Australia, and Sybylla's description of the men as "hopeless, homeless, aimless, shameless" emphasizes the many troubles they face. The rhyme and rhythm of the description also grant it a poetic quality, as if Sybylla is bringing these traveling laborers into the realm of her beloved literature. That perspective is more personal than the one that drives Mrs. Bossier's philanthropy, and it accepts the vagrants as people instead of objects of pity.

Sybylla worries about the cause of the widespread poverty she witnesses. She wonders why Australia, with its vast resources, cannot produce statesmen who care to help their countrymen. Her relatives, on the other hand, are not concerned about the beggars' origins, and simply consider the men "a lazy lot of sneaking creatures." Sybylla asks Uncle Julius if they could employ some of the beggars, or if some law could be made to help them, but Julius only laughs at her and asks if she would have him give his property to a tramp.

The Bossier family's perception of the vagrants as "sneaking creatures" dehumanizes these men. Sybylla recognizes that poverty is too pervasive to be the fault of the poor, but her family members prefer to blame the vagrants for their own misfortune. This lack of both empathy and social awareness is the first indication that Caddagat might not be the flawless sanctuary Sybylla wants it to be. Although Sybylla loves her family at Caddagat, they have never experienced poverty as she has. When Sybylla suggests helping the beggars on a larger scale than simply feeding them, Julius's unsympathetic response highlights the upper class's disregard for the poor.

Sybylla's conversation with Uncle Julius is interrupted by a beggar. Julius responds to the man rudely and tells him that Sybylla is the boss. Sybylla serves him food and tobacco, but he refuses a glass of milk. As the man leaves, he wishes Sybylla God's blessings. Sybylla watches him go, wondering if this man––her brother in humanity––truly believes in God. This sort of thinking rarely troubles Sybylla at **Caddagat**, since she has so many pleasures that she is happy simply to be reckless and young.

Caddagat's role as a safe haven takes on a more insidious note as Sybylla reflects that the privilege she enjoys there allows her to forget about the injustices facing her countrymen. Her interaction with the beggar is a brief confrontation with reality, and it forces her to contend with the worries about religion and justice that plagued her at Possum Gully. However, the privilege of life at Caddagat has not entirely robbed Sybylla of her empathy for the lower classes. She does not mimic Julius's rudeness to the beggar, and she regards the man as her brother.

CHAPTER 15: WHEN THE HEART IS YOUNG

A week after Sybylla first met Harold Beecham, Aunt Helen receives a letter from one of Harold's aunts asking Sybylla to stay with the Beechams while the other Miss Beecham is away. Helen laughs and teases Sybylla about Harold wanting her to come stay, and Sybylla pretends not to understand. Mrs. Bossier agrees to the proposal, and that Wednesday Harold arrives to bring Sybylla to his home, Five-Bob Downs. His red buggy is pulled by a prize-winning horse, and Sybylla and Harold speed down the road. After a time, Harold lets Sybylla take the reins and drive the buggy herself.

Despite Harold's quiet nature, he makes little pretense about his romantic interest in Sybylla. He convinces his aunt to invite Sybylla to Five-Bob Downs, and even Helen immediately understands that Harold wants Sybylla to visit for his own sake. His buggy is also surprisingly flashy, with its red hue and prize-winning horse, which hints that Harold is more dynamic than his stoic nature lets on. Harold also allows Sybylla to drive his buggy, which suggests that he respects her desire for independence and agency.

Harold and Sybylla arrive at Five-Bob Downs station at sunset, a "majestic hour" that highlights the grandeur of the property. They are greeted by Harold's aunt, Gussie Beecham. Miss Beecham knew Mrs. Melvyn and assumes Sybylla will be as beautiful, and Sybylla tries to hide her face to avoid letting Miss Beecham down. Miss Beecham chastises her for this belief, because Harold has told his aunts that Sybylla is beautiful, and the residents of Five-Bob Downs take Harold's judgments as fact.

Sybylla again demonstrates her appreciation for nature by describing the sunset as "majestic." She even goes so far as to suggest that manmade structures are enhanced by the beauty of nature, which positions nature as more impressive than civilization. At Five-Bob Downs, Sybylla also becomes beautiful, at least in the eyes of the residents. Miss Beecham's assurances that Harold thinks Sybylla is beautiful reveals that Harold sees a beauty in Sybylla that she herself does not. The fact that Harold's aunts take his opinions as fact also speaks to his authority as man of the house, despite his youth.

In addition to the Beechams, Five-Bob Downs is home to a little girl called O'Doolan and a number of laborers. O'Doolan adores Harold, and he dotes on her in turn. The laborers eat dinner with the Beechams, but after the meal they retire to a room specifically set apart for them. Miss Beecham asks Sybylla what she thinks of Harold. Sybylla dodges the question by asking if Harold is usually as good-tempered as he appears, and Miss Beecham tells her that Harold is usually of a bad temper. Harold rejoins the conversation, and Sybylla is smitten. She notes that his charm––and his wealth––unintentionally draw the affections and break the hearts of many women.

Sybylla again witnesses tension between classes, and the false egalitarianism of the rich, as the laborers are allowed to dine with the Beechams but not socialize with them after dinner. On a more intimate level, O'Doolan's love for Harold, and his love for her, shows an emotional side to the stoic young man. Sybylla gains further understanding of Harold's hidden depths when Miss Beecham reveals that Harold has a bad temper.

CHAPTER 16: WHEN FORTUNE SMILES

The next day, Sybylla sits with the Beechams outside in the heat. Miss Beecham pokes fun at how formally Harold and Sybylla address each other, so they stop addressing each other at all in her presence and continue to do so formally when they are alone. Sybylla, looking to test Harold's hospitality, asks him to take her out on the river. He accepts, but he has to shoe one of the horses first; Sybylla offers to help. She is not very helpful, and indeed she purposely tries to annoy him. They tease each other for a while, until Sybylla gives in and helps Harold shoe the horse.

Sybylla and Harold conduct themselves awkwardly in front of Miss Beecham, which signifies their uncertainty of how to behave She is older and more mature, while they are young and embarking on their first romantic experiences. They are new to the realm of romance, so they hold fast to the rules of propriety. Sybylla's flirting is especially youthful when she tries to annoy Harold, an exercise reminiscent of a schoolgirl teasing her playground crush. Sybylla is deeply insecure and longs to be loved, but she is also playful and young. Despite her awkwardness in entering a relationship, Harold makes her comfortable enough to indulge her mischievous nature.

Harold and Sybylla go out on the river. She cannot swim but insists on dangling over the side of the boat, and she promptly falls in. Harold grabs her and swims her to shore, and Sybylla laughs heartily at his concern. His concern relaxes, and he remarks that Sybylla would laugh at her own funeral. He tells her to take a hot bath so she doesn't die of a cold, but Sybylla claims that only well-liked "pretty little girls" can die of a cold, while annoying girls live forever to bother everyone around them. Sybylla does run off to go inside, though, because she realizes her wet clothes are too revealing for her modesty.

Sybylla continues to demonstrate her immature recklessness as she puts her own life in danger on the boat. Even after she nearly drowns, Sybylla still finds joy in the experience. Harold is amused by her nonchalance in the face of danger, which recalls how impressed he was that she didn't flinch at his stock-whip. Sybylla's assertion that she is not the sort of "pretty little girl" who can die of a cold is also another instance in which she separates herself from other women. The comment affirms that she still does not consider herself pretty, and the inclusion of "little" indicates that Sybylla associates traditional femininity with fragility. She adds, with her trademark self-deprecating humor, that she will live forever to bother the people around her. This seems to playfully agree with Harold's earlier claim that women only exist to torment men.

That night, Five-Bob Downs hosts several guests for dinner, and Harold demonstrates his skill on the piano and his strong singing voice. This delights Sybylla, and the night is so full of joy that it revitalizes her belief in the goodness of the world. Sybylla's days at Five-Bob Downs are full of joy, as she and Harold play tricks on each other and spend nights dancing with the laborers. Sybylla's thoughts are free from concern for the thousands of people languishing in city slums––she is "selfish," "heedless," "happy," and "young."

Harold's musical skills cement him as a man of culture, showing that he meets one of Sybylla's most important criteria for a partner. She is thrilled to realize this, and Harold's company combined with the comforts of Five-Bob Downs are enough to wash away the last traces of Sybylla's cynicism. She recognizes her own privilege to be able to enjoy such a moment: her youth and immaturity allow her to be selfish and careless in this moment. Though her narration, which comes from an older Sybylla, brings up the thousands of people suffering while the young Sybylla dances, her youthful selfishness lets her be carelessly happy.

Harold proves to be a wonderful host, and Sybylla is disappointed when Uncle Julius comes to take her home after only a week. She is pleased to hear from Mrs. Bossier and Aunt Helen that they missed her, and she rambles to Helen all about her time at Five-Bob Downs. Helen asks what Harold did and said while he and Sybylla spent time together, and Sybylla realizes that although Harold was always present, she cannot recall him ever speaking.

Sybylla is happy that Mrs. Bossier and Aunt Helen missed her, which echoes her desperation for her family at Possum Gully to miss her and shows her continual desire to be loved. For the second time, Sybylla is surprised to realize that Harold spent most of their time together without speaking. The fact that she did not notice Harold's silence in the moment suggests that she talks enough for both of them and is perhaps not as aware of other people as she thinks she is.

CHAPTER 17: IDYLLS OF YOUTH

One of Sybylla's chores, which she greatly enjoys, is to ride a few miles down the road to pick up the mail. Harold usually employs a servant to fetch his mail, but after Sybylla starts to ride for it, Harold does the same. On one of her rides, Sybylla sees laborers camping in the woods as they make their way to new employment.

Sybylla likes riding down the road, which speaks to her innate desire to explore and her love of the natural world. Harold follows her on these errands. He is a man of few words, but he communicates his affection for Sybylla by trying to be close to her. When Sybylla witnesses laborers in temporary housing, the men are mentioned in passing, and Sybylla literally passes them on her way from Caddagat. The camp is relegated to the periphery, but it is still present. This is symbolic of the way Caddagat makes Sybylla forget about the social issues she cares about, while the estate and its residents do nothing to help these issues.

The rest of Sybylla's time is spent in leisure. The Bossiers have brought in a number of young women as guests to **Caddagat** to spend time with Sybylla. They go swimming together, supervised by Aunt Helen, and race home to see who can arrive at the dinner table first. The residents of Caddagat are fond of fishing, so Sybylla joins them. She has no skill at fishing, however, so she acts civilly to Frank Hawden so that he will catch a fish for her while she reads a book. She is a "creature of joy," living a life "made up of little things."

For the first time in her life, Sybylla is surrounded by other young women. However, they do not enter her life organically. Instead, her relatives bring them to Caddagat. This highlights the manufactured perfection of Caddagat. Sybylla does not form a meaningful relationship with any of these girls, which suggests that Caddagat cannot provide everything she needs. Her casual manipulation of Frank Hawden also reiterates her pleasant youthful selfishness. Sybylla describes herself as full of joy from a life of "little things," which indicates a temporary break from her constant ambition. In this moment, she is fulfilled by the company of her family, her flirtation with Harold, and the privileges of Caddagat; her persistent aspirations for a brilliant career are put on hold.

Sybylla is confused Sybylla is confused about Harold's intentions: he escorts her to pick up the mail every week, but never speaks affectionately towards her. She wonders if his kindness is simply due to chivalry. To test this, she takes a buggy instead of a horse to pick up the post, to see what Harold will say. Mrs. Bossier insists Sybylla bring Frank Hawden on the buggy. Sybylla agrees, only to drive off without Hawden while he is opening the gate.

Sybylla is again reluctant to believe that she can be loved. Though Harold seeks out her company, she is quick to look for alternate reasons for his kindness. She also provides another demonstration of her quick-thinking and impulsiveness, as she disobeys Mrs. Bossier and takes the buggy without Hawden. Sybylla's insistence on driving the buggy alone also symbolizes her independence and her desire to lead her own life.

At the Dogtrap homestead, where the mail is posted, Sybylla meets Harold. He is surprised that she drove the buggy by herself and insists that she not drive back alone. Sybylla challenges him, asserting that she is able to take care of herself, and drives away. Harold chases her, which Sybylla takes as proof of his love for her, much to her delight. They bicker, and Sybylla thinks that "men are clumsy, stupid creatures regarding little things, but in their right place they are wonderful animals." She allows him to help her home.

Throughout the story, romantic pursuits take the form of literal chases. While Everard's chase made Sybylla uncomfortable, she is delighted to be chased by Harold. His stoicism and silence make his affection more desirable to the ambitious Sybylla, and the passion evident in the chase excites her. After he catches up to her, Sybylla allows her feelings about men to gain more nuance than plain dislike. She still regards them as "creatures" and "animals," but she acknowledges that many of men's flaws are in regard to "little things." Still, she restricts her acceptance that men can be "wonderful" to men who are in "their right place," which indicates that Sybylla's disdain for men has not been replaced with a universal liking of them. However, her willingness to accept that people are not black-and-white shows that Sybylla is maturing.

Sybylla returns home late, which worries Mrs. Bossier. Sybylla lies to a servant and claims that the harness he worked on broke, and she secures his silence by promising not to tell Uncle Julius about the servant's alleged mistake. When she finds her grandmother, Mrs. Bossier scolds her for leaving Hawden behind. Sybylla justifies this only with a reminder of how much she hates Mr. Hawden, and Mrs. Bossier tries to replace a smile with a stern expression. Julius finds the whole affair funny, and Mrs. Bossier tells him not to encourage Sybylla's "tomboyish ways," or else she will never achieve a "ladylike demeanor."

Though Sybylla views the lower classes with more respect than her relatives do, she still uses her power over a servant at Caddagat for her own self-interest. This is a continuation of the selfishness that Caddagat allows her to indulge. Mrs. Bossier's hidden smile at Sybylla's antics is also a reminder that Mrs. Bossier had a wild youth of her own, and her attempts to suppress that smile mirror her suppression of that youthfulness in favor of conservatism. The fact that Uncle Julius is amused by Sybylla's misbehavior recalls the first chapter, when Mr. Melvyn encouraged Sybylla's childhood horse riding. Mrs. Bossier's worry that Sybylla will be a "tomboy" instead of a "lady" also reflects the language Mrs. Melvyn used when she was concerned about horse riding being unwomanly

CHAPTER 18: AS SHORT AS I WISH HAD BEEN THE MAJORITY OF SERMONS TO WHICH I HAVE BEEN FORCED TO GIVE EAR

Aunt Helen tells Sybylla to be careful around young men, warning her that "some people's age cannot be reckoned by years." When Sybylla loses some of her youth, the maturity of her spirit will be made obvious. If Helen had confronted Sybylla with this a day earlier, Sybylla would have felt guilty, but she is emboldened by Mrs. Bossier's scolding and Hawden's dislike of her, which makes her bitterness that she isn't loveable. She tells Helen sourly that no man could ever fall in love with a plain woman like Sybylla. Helen is sad that Sybylla is so young and already so bitter, but she continues on and asks if Sybylla intends to marry Harold.

Helen's advice that "some people's age cannot be reckoned by years" speaks to the idea that Sybylla is more mature than other girls her age. This, in turn, hints that Sybylla's narration might present herself as more childish than she actually is. Sybylla again demonstrates her belief that she is unlovable, and that fear transforms into bitterness and vitriol.

Helen's question surprises Sybylla, and she repeats her intention never to marry anyone. Helen lists Harold's many virtues, highlighting that he is honest and faithful. When Sybylla counters that Harold is conceited, Helen agrees. But she claims that Sybylla is also conceited, and that this flaw doesn't make a person less loveable. Sybylla is still put off by the notion that Harold might think he could woo any girl just by asking for her hand, and she tells Helen she intends to surprise him by playing hard to get.

Helen does not dismiss Sybylla's belief that Harold is conceited, which demonstrates her consideration for Sybylla's thoughts and feelings. Instead, Helen approaches Sybylla honestly and offers her own belief that Sybylla is just as conceited as she thinks Harold to be. Helen imparts that people can be loved despite their flaws, which challenges Sybylla's insecurity about being too flawed to be loveable. Sybylla reveals that her feelings about love are more complicated than simple insecurity, since she also fears that accepting Harold's feelings would mean submitting to being oppressed by men.

Aunt Helen tells Sybylla never to flirt, because playing with a man's heart is unwomanly. Sybylla scoffs that men have no hearts, only vanity, but Helen insists that men's shortcomings do not justify Sybylla's unwomanly behavior.

Helen tries to impart her own version of womanhood on Sybylla. She describes toying with a man's affection as unwomanly, which indicates how she defines womanhood around virtue and modesty. Sybylla resists this model of womanhood, however, since she believes that men are too vain to be hurt by her actions.

CHAPTER 19: THE 9TH OF NOVEMBER 1896

Every year to celebrate the Prince of Wales's birthday, **Caddagat**'s neighboring course Wyambeet hosts a horse-race, which is then followed by a servants' ball at one of the local estates. Most residents of the district, both servants and estate owners, attend the races, and this year Sybylla goes with her family. Uncle Julius drives them to the course, and Sybylla cheers him on. Julius remarks that he is glad to see Sybylla has the spirit of an Australian, while Mrs. Bossier says that Sybylla has the spirit of an Australian but lacks the manners of a lady. Aunt Helen points out that if Sybylla can use up her excess energy on the drive to Wyambeet, she might be well-behaved at the racecourse itself.

The nationalist pride that runs through the novel reappears as the characters discuss what makes an Australian spirit. Julius characterizes Sybylla's excitement and enthusiasm as Australian. This indicates that other characters share Sybylla's interest in national identity and are seeking examples of that identity. Julius finds an example in Sybylla, which adds to her characterization as a young woman deeply of her homeland. Mrs. Bossier's assertion that Sybylla's Australian spirit is unladylike also continues Sybylla's characterization as different from other women––but it also questions whether traditional conventions of femininity suit the Australian nation. Contrasting ladylike behavior and the Australian spirit suggests that expectations of womanhood are antithetical to the national identity Australians are constructing.

The buggy comes across a vehicle from Five-Bob Downs, which Harold is driving. The rest of the buggy is full of ladies, including one who sits beside him in the buggy. This disappoints Sybylla, who expected Harold to come alone. He has spent so much time alone with her that she subconsciously came to think of him as hers exclusively, and she loses some of her excitement when she realizes he will belong to those other ladies for the day.

Sybylla is disappointed to see that Harold belongs to other women for the day, which demonstrates how Sybylla thinks of romantic relationships as a form of ownership. This adds to her resistance to marriage: she is too independent to accept being owned by a man. The many women around Harold also remind Sybylla––and the reader––that Harold is a wealthy young bachelor. Marriage to him would be socially advantageous for many women, and those women are more willing than Sybylla to pursue Harold openly.

Uncle Julius notes Sybylla's disappointment when she comes to help him with the horses, and he encourages her to "stick to her guns" to win the master of Five-Bobs Down. Sybylla claims not to understand, but Julius says she can't deceive him––he is well aware of Sybylla and Harold's flirtation, and if the relationship had been with any other man, Julius would have put a stop to it long ago. Harold, Julius tells Sybylla, is a good, sensible man with nothing against him except his lion-like temper. He adds that Sybylla could easily handle that temper if she doesn't mind "giving in and coaxing a little."

Harold has apparently shown his temper to everyone except Sybylla, which suggests a unique concern for her opinion of him. Julius doesn't see Harold's temper as a serious flaw, and in his eyes it certainly does not prevent Harold from being a suitable match for Sybylla. Julius remarks that he would have stopped a flirtation with any man besides Harold, subtly reminding Sybylla of Julius's power over her as both an adult and a man. It also reveals that, despite Julius's willingness to let Sybylla teasingly flirt with and kiss boys like Everard, he shares Mrs. Bossier's more conservative values when it comes to serious flirtation. Julius advises Sybylla to manage Harold's temper by "giving in and coaxing a little," which puts the responsibility of managing a husband's moods on his wife. A woman is expected to obediently "give in" to her husband's demands while also using her feminine sensibilities and morality to "coax" him to rationality.

Sybylla insists that her feelings for Harold are purely platonic, and that even if Harold proposed to her, she would not marry him. She is tired of everyone assuming she would marry a man for wealth, especially because she has no desire to marry at all. Her only ambition is to find a profession that will support lifelong independence. Julius responds only with a joke, telling her that she can take up a profession as his assistant.

Sybylla reasserts her need for independence, showing that her feelings for Harold have not curbed her desire for a career. Julius dismisses her opinions, and he does so with a joke. This indicates that Uncle Julius's good nature and humor are genuine, but his concern for other people does not extend past those qualities. This carelessness mirrors the selfishness that Sybylla sometimes feels at Caddagat, but she attributes that feeling to her youth. Julius, on the other hand, has lived a life of too much privilege to take other people's feelings seriously.

Sybylla leaves Julius to find Mrs. Bossier, but instead she finds Joe Archer, a jackaroo she knows from Five-Bob Downs. They sit together and discuss literature for a while. Their conversation is interrupted by Harold Beecham, who tells Sybylla that Mrs. Bossier sent him to find her for lunch. Harold gives a quizzical look to Archer, who blushes uneasily. Harold offers to escort Sybylla to her grandmother, but Sybylla rebuffs him in favor of Archer. When Harold leaves, Archer complains that Harold is going to punish him severely, since Harold has "a roaring derry on disobedience." Sybylla is interested in the bad temper she keeps hearing about in Harold, since he always appears calm to her. She wants to see some emotion in him.

Joe Archer is a jackeroo, a young laborer working on a station to gain experience. He shares an occupation with Frank Hawden, but the two men could not be more different. Archer is intelligent and well-read, and he respects Sybylla as a peer. This contrast to Hawden highlights that Hawden's poor qualities are not due to his low social class, but to his personal sense of entitlement. Jackeroos are just as capable as gentlemen of possessing the culture and education that Sybylla looks for in a friend. Archer is also more cautious than the brash Hawden, as seen in his anxiety about Harold's anger. Archer is the latest in a string of people who know of Harold's temper, and from Archer, that temper takes on an authoritative air. Harold not only has a temper, but he holds a "roaring derry," or grudge, against disobedience specifically. Despite Sybylla's values of justice and independence, she is not put off by Harold's temper––she simply wants to see it in action.

Sybylla joins the parties from **Caddagat** and Five-Bob Downs for lunch. Among them is Miss Blanche Derrick, who is considered the most beautiful woman in Melbourne. Archer tells Sybylla that Miss Derrick has set her intention to marry Harold, and that while she is as handsome as people say, she is also haughty and only pays attention to men with large fortunes. During the races, Sybylla takes no interest in the horses. Instead, she watches Harold and Miss Derrick, who look beautiful together, and she bitterly laments her own lack of beauty.

Miss Derrick triggers a resurgence of Sybylla's insecurity about her appearance. She is presented as an attractive and ladylike woman, unlike Sybylla, and serves mainly as a source of envy for Sybylla. She is a two-dimensional representation of conventional femininity, and her haughtiness and desire to marry for money do not disrupt Sybylla's jealousy. Rather, these negative qualities are features of the traditional femininity that Sybylla simultaneously looks down on and envies.

Sybylla excuses herself and joins some children to pick flowers. She does not return for a long time, and when she does, Harold meets her. Mrs. Bossier and the **Caddagat** group have returned home, so the group from Five-Bob Downs will be taking Sybylla home with them for the night. Sybylla protests that she has nothing to wear to dinner. Harold offers her the many dresses they have at Five-Bob Downs, but Sybylla scoffs that men are too stupid to know about fashion. Harold counters that young men know enough to want a young lady at dinner no matter how she is dressed. She agrees to join the Beechams when she learns Aunt Helen will be coming to Five-Bob Downs with them, since she would be content to follow Helen anywhere.

Sybylla and Harold resume their usual banter regarding the roles of women and men. Sybylla, as usual, describes men as stupid and ignorant to the rules of beauty. Harold does not disagree with her assessment, simply making clear that he wants her at dinner. This highlights that he enjoys playing along with Sybylla's good-humored teasing, but he does not share her desire to "win" social interactions. Sybylla relents to come to dinner, largely because Aunt Helen will be there. Helen has been largely absent from the narrative as Sybylla develops a relationship with Harold, but Sybylla has not forgotten her love for her aunt. She trusts Helen implicitly, which suggests that Sybylla values Helen's model of sad and noble womanhood more than the others she has seen.

CHAPTER 20: SAME YARN (CONT.)

The servants and laborers at Five-Bob Downs have left to attend the servants' ball, so Harold leaves to attend to the horses. Sybylla and Aunt Helen do not have access to their wardrobes, so they make themselves presentable as best they can and then go down to dinner. At the table are 20 other guests, including Joe Archer and Miss Derrick. Sybylla gets her first look at Miss Derrick and perceives that she is governed by self-confidence and propriety instead of emotions. Miss Derrick would never make a fool of herself, nor become a genuine companion to her husband. Sybylla thinks that the notion of a husband wanting a wife to act as his companion, rather than a prize to show off to his friends, is a modern-day myth.

Sybylla's understanding of companionship suggests that she believes in the possibility of an equal partnership between a man and a woman. That partnership, however, does not exist within marriage, and a woman would make a fool of herself in pursuit of it. Sybylla sees a wife as a possession of her husband, which he can show off as he pleases. This highlights that Sybylla perceives marriage's social role for men is one of reputation-building. In Sybylla's mind, a traditional woman like Miss Derrick would accept this arrangement with ease, as she is not dominated by her emotions like Sybylla.

Since the guests have to serve themselves, the dinner is informal, and afterwards they all help wash the dishes. Despite the heat of the evening, the younger guests propose dancing, and they go to the dancing room to play piano and dance together. After a few songs, Harold orders Joe Archer to play a waltz and asks for the pleasure of dancing with Sybylla. She protests that her poor dancing ability will not bring him pleasure, but he asks her to let him judge his own pleasure, and the two begin to dance. As they move, he tells Sybylla to come to his room to strike a bargain.

The presence of Joe Archer again allows Harold to exert his authority, which is especially notable because Archer is one of the only laborers eating with the guests instead of attending the servants' ball. While Archer's presence at the dinner suggests a level of privilege, Harold undermines that privilege when he orders the jackeroo to separate from the dancing guests and provide them with a waltz. During the waltz, Sybylla once again demonstrates her insecurity, as she insists Harold will be displeased by her dancing. Harold's request that she let him decide what pleases him is symbolic of their relationship: she refuses to believe he can love her, and he only wants to convince her of his feelings.

Sybylla does what Harold asks and follows him to a detached building considered Harold's domain. They stand apart, and he tells her, calmly, that "it is no use [...] making a long yarn about nothing," so he will not make a speech––instead, he simply asks her, "Yes or no?" Sybylla is stricken and disappointed by Harold's lack of emotion. Despite his proposal, he still has not professed his love or asked her to profess hers. Sybylla attributes this to Harold's conceitedness, but the older Sybylla who narrates the story says that this interpretation was wrong. Harold is just a quiet and straightforward man who expresses himself through actions and expects others to do the same.

Harold's reluctance to "making a long yarn about nothing" marks a contrast between him and Sybylla. In her narration, Sybylla frequently recognizes that her story is boring or egotistical, but she continues telling it. She believes in the importance of words and stories, which is why she is so disappointed that Harold refuses to vocalize his love for her. Her narration rejects the notion that Harold is conceited, but his expectation that everyone else express themselves in the same way he does suggests that Harold shares some of Sybylla's habit of projecting her own beliefs onto other people.

With some annoyance, Sybylla accepts Harold's proposal. She internally qualifies her acceptance as temporary and intends to break it off one day to surprise Harold and cure his conceitedness. Harold is pleasantly surprised; he laughs that he never thought Sybylla would say yes "so easily, just like any other girl." He moves to kiss her.

Though she accepts Harold's proposal, which on the surface should be a symbol of maturity, Sybylla retains her youthful selfishness. She does not consider how she might hurt Harold with her scheme to undermine what she sees as conceitedness. The core of that perceived conceitedness seems to be his belief that she will agree to marry him. Sybylla's wariness of that harkens back to her uncomfortable confrontations with Frank Hawden. However, Harold does not share Hawden's sense of entitlement to Sybylla's affection. In fact, he is surprised that Sybylla agrees to marry him. He is especially startled that Sybylla would behave like "any other girl." This underscores that Sybylla's perception of herself as different to other young women is shared by those around her, and the fact that Harold shares that perception suggests that he likes Sybylla's unconventionality.

Sybylla is unsure why she undertakes her following action. Perhaps she is hysterical; perhaps she is irritated by Harold's sudden assumption of ownership over her; perhaps Satan himself took hold of her. Whatever the reason, Sybylla responds to Harold's kiss by grabbing a whip and striking him across the face. The wound cuts across his face, and anger enters his eyes. Harold moves slightly, and Sybylla hopes he will hit her back. She is paralyzed by the significance of her action. She drops the whip and falls to the ground, hoping that Harold will beat her. She is humiliated at her unwomanly attack of a man, who is bound by the laws of his sex not to strike a woman.

Sybylla acknowledges her own status as an unreliable narrator, as she cannot fully explain her behavior. Her attack with the whip recalls the first day of Harold and Sybylla's relationship. They first bonded when Harold playfully showed off with his stock-whip, and Sybylla trusted him not to hurt her with it. Now, Sybylla has intentionally whipped Harold in the face. This suggests that Harold handles his relationships, particularly his courtship with Sybylla, with more gentleness and forethought than Sybylla does. The violence is also gendered; women are not supposed to be aggressive, and Sybylla is ashamed by her own unwomanliness. Harold, on the other hand, holds to the laws of conventional manliness and does not reciprocate an attack.

Harold breaks the silence. He calmly informs Sybylla that a less violent rejection would have stopped him from kissing her, though he didn't realize that a kiss from a fiancé would be so offensive to her. Sybylla wants to tell him that she does not blame him, but she cannot bring herself to speak. Harold cleans his face with water and comes over to comfort Sybylla. He reassures her that he knows she didn't mean to hurt him and apologizes for speaking harshly to her. In a gesture of forgiving courtesy, he asks Sybylla to tie his handkerchief for him. She does so, and they return to the other guests.

For the first time, Harold is the one who speaks, while Sybylla remains silent. This completes the reversal of their usual roles, since Harold typically expresses himself through his actions, but Sybylla took up that role with the whip. Despite the sudden violence, Harold forgives Sybylla easily. This demonstrates the extent of his love for her, but it also hints that he is perhaps overly eager to overlook Sybylla's flaws.

The other dinner guests ask what happened to Harold, but he dismisses their questions and puts the matter to an end. Sybylla slips away from the party to reason through the events of the night. She cannot understand why Harold Beecham would choose a charmless, ugly woman like her. Is his proposal a whim, or does he really love her? She stands in the dark as music begins to play again inside. Harold comes through the flowers calling her name and asks Sybylla to come in and dance with him. She agrees, and they dance for a few more hours. That night, Sybylla does not sleep, but lies awake listening to the owls.

Back at the party, Harold asserts his social influence by shutting down any gossip about how he was injured. Meanwhile, Sybylla falls back into brooding over her insecurities. Her fear that Harold proposed on a whim provides a possible reason for her outburst with the whip. It also complicates her feelings about the engagement in general––she does not want to be married, but she desperately wants to be loved. To puzzle through this, Sybylla sits outside, where she can take in the Australian landscape. She continues to take solace in the distinctive wildlife of Australia later that night, when she stays awake listening to the calls of the mopoke owls.

CHAPTER 21: MY UNLADYLIKE BEHAVIOUR AGAIN

The next morning Joe Archer brings Sybylla and Aunt Helen back to **Caddagat**. Harold tells Sybylla that he will visit her the following Sunday, so on Sunday morning Sybylla waits with him on the branch of a willow tree by the road. He rides up on a horse and joins her on the branch. His eye has recovered from its injury, though he still bears a mark on his cheek. Harold gives Sybylla a ring, but when he tries to put it on her finger, she pulls away. She wants to wait three months as a probation period to see how they get along as a couple, and if they still want to marry each other after that time, then they will be irrevocably engaged. This amuses Harold, but he agrees. He gives Sybylla the ring anyway, and she assents to wear it sometimes.

Sybylla's resistance to wearing the engagement ring speaks to her reluctance to accept the engagement itself. The ring makes the abstract concept of marriage to Harold a reality, and Sybylla is still intent not to marry. Just as he forgave Sybylla for striking him with a whip, Harold does not take her suggestion of a three-month probation as a signal that Sybylla is not invested in their marriage.

Sybylla and Harold descend from the tree. Sybylla can climb down easily when she is alone, but in Harold's company, it becomes "an awkward performance," and she requires his help to come down. Mrs. Bossier happens to pass by just in time to see Sybylla standing on Harold as she climbs down, and Mrs. Bossier is the angriest Sybylla has ever seen her. She shames Sybylla fiercely for her immodesty and forwardness and demands that Sybylla spend the rest of the day fasting and praying alone in her room.

Sybylla's awkward descent from the tree represents how her relationship with Harold stands in the way of achievements she could reach independently. An action that comes naturally to her––climbing down––becomes an awkward display, and the word "performance" highlights Sybylla's awareness and self-consciousness at being watched. The consequences of being watched are even more severe when Mrs. Bossier witnesses Sybylla's improper conduct with Harold. Mrs. Bossier construes the young couple's physical intimacy as a step too far, and she is no longer amused by Sybylla's youthful recklessness.

Punishment has never worked on Sybylla, but she respects her grandmother's principles, so she locks herself in her room as Mrs. Bossier commands. Sybylla is ashamed. She would never intentionally be forward and immodest with men, since she never sees a real difference between men and women that would inspire her to be overly bold. Mrs. Bossier visits Sybylla in her room with an opportunity to apologize. Sybylla tells her grandmother that she cannot apologize because she doesn't think she has done anything wrong, but she is sorry to have upset Mrs. Bossier. Mrs. Bossier replies that Sybylla's lack of repentance is precisely what worries her.

Sybylla is stubborn and strong-willed, but she respects Mrs. Bossier. She is genuinely sorry to have caused her grandmother distress, even though Sybylla doesn't think her behavior warranted Mrs. Bossier's reaction. Sybylla believes immodesty is prompted by women's nervousness with men and a desire to impress them. Since she lacks both of these qualities, she has never worried about being immodest. Her acknowledgment that men and women are not fundamentally different challenges both the prevailing belief of her time and her own dislike of men. Mrs. Bossier does not recognize any wisdom or maturity in Sybylla's words, however, and fears what Sybylla's unrepentant boldness will mean for her future.

Harold joins the Bossiers for tea, and Sybylla is amused to imagine what Harold might think of his future wife being punished for naughtiness. That night, Harold knocks at Sybylla's window. He tells her that he tried to persuade Mrs. Bossier of Sybylla's innocence, but "old people often have troublesome straitlaced ideas." Still, he is sure the trouble will be over by tomorrow. Sybylla does not answer, so Harold leaves.

Sybylla's amusement at being both engaged and punished for naughtiness speaks to the contrast between the infantilizing language of "naughty girl" and the image of a mature young woman ready for marriage. Since Sybylla does not consider herself ready for marriage, she can entertain herself with these conflicting identities. Later, when Harold comes to visit Sybylla, his remark that "old people often have troublesome straitlaced ideas" is one of the first times he is openly disrespectful of an elder. It is also the first time he reveals disdain for the conservative values of the older generation. Although Harold is demonstrating a mindset similar to Sybylla's, she is not as interested in him as he is in her, and she does not open the window to greet him.

For the next two weeks, Sybylla sees Harold frequently at social events, but the two do not engage one-on-one. She flirts with other young men, but Harold does not care, and Sybylla is finally convinced that Harold lacks any emotion or passion at all. She looks forward to the end of their three months' probation, so she can be done with Harold Beecham.

Sybylla's feelings toward Harold are complex and contradictory. She doesn't want to marry him, but she still wants him to prove his love for her by displaying some emotion, even if that emotion is negative. His stoicism drives her to be more forward towards men, despite Mrs. Bossier's recent reprimands, and despite her own disinterest in romance. It also drives her to look forward to time passing, which is a shift from her previous minute-by-minute enjoyment of life at Caddagat.

CHAPTER 22: SWEET SEVENTEEN

Sybylla turns 17 at a time when the farm hands are away from **Caddagat**. When a drover announces that 20,000 sheep are going to be passing through the Bossier's land, Sybylla volunteers to herd them so they do not devour Caddagat's pastures. She walks along with the shepherds, making conversation with their leader, George Ledwood, about what life as a drover is like. She is surprised at how well-educated he sounds and decides his pleasant manner must mean he is a ne'er-do-well. After the sheep leave Caddagat, Sybylla shakes Mr. Ledwood's hand, and they both express a mutual desire to meet again someday.

Sybylla once again demonstrates that she sees laborers and peasants as fellow humans, rather than a different class of being that she cannot speak to. Like Joe Archer, George Ledwood is surprisingly eloquent for a man of his station, spotlighting another man who has achieved some education despite lack of means. Sybylla assumes that someone as gentlemanly as Ledwood must be on the road because he is running away from trouble, and she comes to the conclusion that he is some kind of rogue. She doesn't feel threatened, and she has great fun walking with the drovers until they have to leave. This is another instance of Sybylla's curiosity and love of new experiences. Her handshake with Mr. Ledwood is also a physical symbol of her solidarity with Australia's laborers.

When Sybylla returns home, Mrs. Bossier inquires after the sheep and the drovers. Sybylla tells her everything, and Mrs. Bossier allows her to spend the rest of the day at leisure. Sybylla enjoys the outdoors, and the beauty of nature makes her believe "life is a joy." She is thrilled to be 17, a young age with so much life ahead, and she is happy to be alive in such a delightful world. She feels a dominance over the world, as if it will give her anything she wants, and she relishes in her youth and her joy.

In stark contrast to Sybylla's previous cynicism, she now cherishes her life and the world at large. Her ambitions are kindled by the landmark of her 17th birthday, and she relishes in the many years she has ahead of her. Her delight in the world comes from a sense of power over it, which suggests that Sybylla's pessimism at Possum Gully came from her feeling of helplessness about her fate. Now that Caddagat has made her dreams of a brilliant career seem possible, the world itself seems brighter.

Guests arrive, including Harold Beecham. He is surprised to see Sybylla quiet, and Harold's friend Mr. Goodchum suggests sneaking up on Sybylla and tickling her. Goodchum tries to tickle her, but Sybylla leaps up as soon as he touches her, and the two smile at each other in good-natured surprise. Harold and Mrs. Bossier ask if the two know each other, and Goodchum reveals that they had an encounter once at the bank where Goodchum works. Harold mentions that today is Sybylla's birthday, and Goodchum asks how old Sybylla is. When she answers 17, he recites, "Sweet seventeen and never been kissed," then asks if Sybylla has ever been kissed. She tells him she hasn't. He moves to kiss her, and she runs away, with Goodchum in close pursuit.

Once again, a young man chases Sybylla in hopes of kissing her. This time, the man is Mr. Goodchum, whose name establishes his friendly, easygoing manner even before he begins joking with Sybylla. He teases Sybylla about turning 17 without having kissed a boy, and he takes it upon himself to remedy that issue. His joking pursuit of her, joined with the specific reference to her age, highlights that Sybylla will not be able to avoid men and romance the way she did as a little girl.

Instead of kissing Sybylla, Goodchum walks with her through the gully. He suggests they carve their initials into a tree, and Sybylla agrees. After he carves the initials, circling them with a heart, he gives Sybylla his hat, and it is then that Harold Beecham encounters Sybylla and Goodchum. He tells Goodchum that they need to leave, and he rejects Sybylla's plea for him to stay for cake. However, the festive mood of the other guests and the supply of alcohol persuade Harold to stay a bit longer. Uncle Julius tells Sybylla to pick fruit from the orchard, but when Goodchum offers to accompany her, Harold insists he will escort Sybylla instead. He takes on the task with such a "resolute tragic manner" that Goodchum quietly makes fun of him to Sybylla.

In this moment, there's a palpable sense that Harold Beecham is not Sybylla's only romantic option—even if she herself isn't actually pursuing a genuinely romantic connection with Goodchum. What this scene does, though, is allow readers to observe how, exactly, Harold will respond to a potential romantic adversary. It has already been established that Harold has a nasty temper, but he seems to keep it in check in this scene (for now, at least), suggesting that he's capable of prioritizing his desire to treat Sybylla well over his temper.

CHAPTER 23: AH, FOR ONE HOUR OF BURNING LOVE, 'TIS WORTH AN AGE OF COLD RESPECT!

Harold and Sybylla walk in silence to the orchard. Sybylla is wearing the ring Harold gave her, but she wears the stones facing inward toward her palm so the ring will not be recognized as a symbol of engagement. They collect cherries in silence until Harold abruptly grabs hold of Sybylla with the strength of a lion. Sybylla tries to pull away, shouting at Harold to unhand her, but she is excited to have awoken some passion in him.

Sybylla wears the engagement ring, but she hides its symbolic importance by concealing the stones. This suggests that her reluctance to marry Harold is partially driven by a concern for outside judgment, as even when she wears the ring, she does not want other people to know its significance. Harold grabs Sybylla, and her description of his strength as lionlike makes clear this is a demonstration of the lion's temper that Julius warned her about. Sybylla is not frightened of Harold's anger––she has succeeded in her goal to drive him to show some passion.

Harold demands Sybylla explains her conduct with other men. Sybylla says that she has the right to behave as she likes, without Harold's permission, but Harold reminds her that he could get any other woman to marry him and behave properly. Finally, he lets go of her. Sybylla throws her ring at Harold and mocks him, claiming she never planned to marry him and let him treat her as a slave. Harold looks so shaken by this that Sybylla starts to believe a little in love.

Sybylla once again makes clear her low view of marriage. She believes life as a wife to be the same as life as an enslaved person, since her husband would own her and she would owe him submissive obedience. Harold angrily reminds her that he could easily marry a more conventional woman, which shows that he is aware of his own desirability as a bachelor. Just as she mocked Frank Hawden for his marriage proposal, Sybylla turns on Harold. Her stubborn tirade is disrupted, though, by Harold's response. He is so troubled by Sybylla's cruelty that she has to reconsider her views on love.

Harold tells Sybylla that he believes in three types of women: one who would marry any man for money, one who would flirt with anybody and "disgrac[e] the name of woman," and one who would marry a man and be faithful to him. He thought Sybylla only pretends to be "heartless and worthless" because of her youth, but he now believes she has no good in her at all. Sybylla scoffs and tells him to find a proper lady to marry, but her rudeness stems not from malice but her own pain and bitterness at lack of love.

Just as Sybylla is learning different types of womanhood, Harold has preconceived notions of what a woman must be. His description of flirting as "disgracing the name of woman" shows that he shares Mrs. Bossier's distaste for female forwardness, and his distinction of a woman who only marries for money reveals that he has no interest in marrying a woman like the beautiful Mrs. Derrick. He accuses Sybylla of being "heartless and worthless," which is similar to the language Sybylla uses against herself in her periods of self-loathing. She responds rudely, but she recognizes that she is lashing out due to her own pain. This self-awareness speaks to Sybylla's increasing maturity, even if her conversation with Harold is immature.

As Harold departs, Sybylla has a moment of empathy for him. She recognizes that she led him on because she thought him emotionless, but he has proven that he is in fact capable of passion, and probably of love as well. She wonders if men might suffer more than a blow to their vanity when they are rejected. She realizes she is in the wrong and has acted unwomanly. Sybylla is ashamed, especially because she really does like Harold.

Harold's display of emotion casts Sybylla's entire perspective on men into doubt. She has used Harold's lack of passion to validate her belief that men are creatures driven by vanity, not love, but his actions have proved that mindset false. As she reshapes her view of men, Sybylla strengthens her definition of womanhood, as well. She concludes that she had no right to judge Harold's behavior and that to do so was unwomanly, suggesting that her guilt over mistreating Harold has led her to accept some of the submissiveness expected of women.

Sybylla goes after Harold in the orchard. She expects him to be as rude to her as she was to him, but still she apologizes for being cruel and unwomanly. She wants to be friends again, but Harold wants to be more. He is surprised to hear that Sybylla has felt unloved by him, since he loves her so deeply, but he worries that she does not love him. Sybylla tells him she "very nearly love[s]" him, but she needs time. Harold isn't sure Sybylla can trust him after seeing him in bad temper, but Sybylla assures him that she liked his passion and, if they were married, would always defy Harold when he was in that state.

Sybylla expects Harold to spurn her, but she apologizes anyway. This is a marked lack of selfishness from the usually self-absorbed Sybylla: her apology is not about earning Harold's forgiveness, but about acknowledging to him that she was in the wrong. Again, her fear of being unwomanly resurfaces, and again Sybylla must confront her understanding of love. Harold reveals that he has never wavered in his love for Sybylla, and has in fact worried that she doesn't return his feelings; this suggests that Sybylla is more lovable than she believes, and it continues the theme in their relationship of misunderstanding each other despite genuine affection. While Sybylla is usually the one seeking love, now she is trying to bring herself to love Harold fully instead of "very nearly" loving him. Even as she grapples with this relationship and her fear of being unwomanly, Sybylla demonstrates her strong will by promising to defy Harold when he is in a temper.

Sybylla and Harold return to the birthday party. Uncle Julius gives Sybylla a doll, which disappoints her, but Julius insists that playing with a doll is more appropriate than worrying about homeless men and politics. Sybylla behaves properly for the rest of the evening, and at the end of the night, Harold tells Sybylla she is "the best little woman in the world." That night, Sybylla sits at her writing table and thinks for a while. She has come to realize that men are not invincible, and that they have feelings after all. She laughs to herself and quietly announces that she and Harold are "quits." When she undresses for the night, she finds bruises along her arms from Harold grabbing her. She has thoroughly enjoyed her birthday.

Uncle Julius giving Sybylla a doll signifies his attempt to confine her to conventional femininity. A doll is a traditionally feminine toy, and Julius strengthens the gendered aspect of it by insisting that Sybylla should pay attention to her doll instead of politics and social justice. This gesture demeans Sybylla due to her gender, but also due to her age, as a toy infantilizes her and implies she is not mature enough to understand political matters. Harold's description of Sybylla as "the best little woman" is also unintentionally condescending, though he means it from a place of love. Harold's behavior that night has redefined Sybylla's understanding of men, and she sees them as more human than she once did. She believes she and Harold are now "quits"––that is, on equal terms.

CHAPTER 24: THOU KNOWEST NOT WHAT A DAY MAY BRING FORTH

Sybylla sees Harold again two weeks later. He approaches her while she rests on a hammock, and she pretends to be asleep to see if he will kiss her. He instead shakes her awake. The gesture messes up her hair, and she demands Harold fix it––however, he can't determine what the problem is. Sybylla scoffs, noting the irony that men can excel in academic and political matters, but are at a loss when it comes to personal grooming or domestic arts.

Sybylla notices that men can succeed outside the home but are helpless in the domestic sphere. This speaks to the division of labor that was popularized in the 19th century. The division of labor positioned men as the breadwinners of a family, who should conduct their business outside the home, while women were homemakers and did their work inside their houses. The division between men and women also mirrors the smaller, more immediate division between Harold and Sybylla in this scene. Harold is unable to see a problem that seems obvious to Sybylla, which is representative of their broader relational dynamic.

Harold surprises Sybylla by telling her about a stroke of misfortune. Sybylla does not understand how business functions, so she only understands the gist: Harold has not been as wealthy as the public imagined, and he has been steadily losing wealth since his bank failed three years ago. Sybylla knows that many more men are suffering much worse, but Harold has been brought up rich and suddenly made equal as the laborers who work on his land. She marvels at his composure and self-containment.

Harold's condition of sudden poverty echoes the Melvyns' loss of fortune at Possum Gully. Sybylla described the abrupt arrival of poverty as more difficult to handle than growing up in poverty, since it carries with it the shame of failure. She repeats that sentiment here, emphasizing that Harold is now equal to the men who once worked for him. She understands the emotional toll this situation must take on Harold, which only makes her more impressed at his ability to maintain his composure.

Harold tells Sybylla that he does not expect her to stay faithful to him now that he is a pauper, and he hopes that she finds a good husband in another man. Sybylla has been poor, and she knows the disillusionment, cynicism, and bitterness in Harold's future. She chases after him and tells him that she will marry him when she turns 21, regardless of his fortunes. She runs off, and Harold heads home whistling, because "men are very weak and simple in some ways."

Harold is aware of the social realities that that he and Sybylla operate in. He doesn't see marriage as a primarily economic arrangement, as Mrs. Bossier does, and he doesn't see it as an expression of ownership over his life, as Sybylla does, but he still recognizes that his love for Sybylla is not more important than his ability to provide for her. Sybylla has always pushed against the idea of marrying a man for his wealth. Now that Harold has lost his fortune, however, Sybylla feels obligated to help him through his newfound poverty, especially because she has experience dealing with financial hardship. In a sense, then, she is marrying a man because of his lack *of wealth.*

Sybylla laughs at her own vanity to think that she is important enough to help Harold through life. He is strong, healthy, level-headed, and well-connected. More than all that, he is a man in a world made for men. She calls herself young, ugly, poor, insignificant, and "only a woman!" Only the most desperate man, Sybylla thinks, would need a woman like her for support.

Sybylla falls back into her insecurities. She compares herself to Harold, finding more and more flaws in herself as she finds more positive qualities in him. Even though Harold shares some of the traits she dislikes in herself––he too is young, and now he is also poor––Sybylla reserves her disdain for herself. Her insecurities are also distinctly gendered, as she chastises herself for thinking she could help Harold when she is "only a woman." She doesn't blame herself entirely for the limits of womanhood, however. She implicitly recognizes that womanhood is only a disadvantage because the world is made for men, not because of any inherent weakness in women.

CHAPTER 25: BECAUSE?

The Beechams leave Five-Bob Downs before Christmas. The Beecham aunts will be in Melbourne while Harold manages his affairs in Sydney. Despite Mrs. Bossier's strictness for propriety, she is so used to Harold's presence at **Caddagat** that she allows him to visit with Sybylla freely before he leaves.

Harold's life after losing his fortune follows a similar track to the Melvyns', though their paths are not entirely identical. Like the Melvyns, Harold is giving up his beloved home, but Mr. Melvyn sold Bruggabrong before losing the family fortune, while Harold and his aunts leave as a consequence of their loss. Leading up to their departure, it becomes clear that Harold and Sybylla's relationship has developed enough for people around them to notice the change. They are so familiar with each other that even Mrs. Bossier allows them to speak without supervision. This marks a change in Mrs. Bossier's opinion of the couple's relationship since the incident at the tree, when Mrs. Bossier punished Sybylla for her forwardness.

Harold asks Sybylla if she really intends to marry him and pleads with her to think through the sacrifice she is making. Sybylla protests that she is not the kind of person who only cares for those with money; however, she makes Harold promise that if he meets a girl he likes more than Sybylla, he will not worry about staying faithful to her. He makes this promise easily, assuming that he will never have to keep it. Sybylla promises in turn that she will never flirt seriously with another man until it is time for she and Harold to marry. He tells Sybylla he trusts her, and they agree not to write to each other until Sybylla turns 21.

Harold again expresses concern that Sybylla is binding herself to a pauper, but Sybylla insists she is happy to marry Harold even when he has no money. However, she makes Harold promise not to restrain himself from loving other women. This demonstrates both her continued insecurities and her uncertainty about the marriage. She does not trust that she is the best woman for Harold, and she wants to give him ample time to realize this.

Sybylla truly loves Harold, but not enough to want to bear his children. She does not consider explaining her feelings to him because he is so practical and orthodox that he could never understand. She repeats her intent to marry Harold when she turns 21. When Harold leaves for Five-Bob Downs later, he gives her "one light, gentle, diffident kiss."

For the first time, Sybylla contends with the idea of taking on another female role: the role of mother. She is resistant to this notion, but she cannot justify her feelings with any logic, so she doesn't believe them reasonable enough to share with the sensible Harold. When he kisses her, the kiss is not sensible or orthodox, but "light, gentle, [and] diffident." The modesty and lack of confidence in these adjectives is surprising for the masculine, often aggressive Harold. The kiss suggests that Harold's love for Sybylla makes him capable of tenderness.

Sybylla stares at the hills in the distance and cries. She convinces herself that she is disappointed in love––because, although she loves Sybylla "as much as [she] could ever love anyone," she does not want to marry him. She thinks she's selfish and cowardly for this. Later, when her relatives ask about Harold, Sybylla does not tell them he paid her a visit.

Sybylla is confused by her own tears, and she persuades herself that she is disappointed in love. The fact that she actively convinces herself of this thought suggests that Sybylla finds it easier to be disappointed in love (which she has already made up her mind to distrust anyway) than to acknowledge the complexity of her feelings for Harold. Although Sybylla desperately wants to be loved, she doubts her own ability to love. This is evident in her confession that she loves Harold "as much as [she] could ever love anyone," which suggests that she does not think herself capable of loving to the extent that she wants to.

CHAPTER 26: BOAST NOT THYSELF OF TOMORROW

Christmas at **Caddagat** is a happy occasion with many guests, though Sybylla sorely feels Harold's absence. She looks forward to visiting Everard Grey in Sydney. She hopes Everard might be able to aid her ambition for a career in show business, which would allow her to help Harold financially without marrying him. While she waits for the trip to Sydney, Sybylla's enjoyment of everyday "little pleasures" makes her temporarily forget her "wild unattainable ambitions," such as writing.

With Harold gone, Sybylla turns her attention back to her ambitions. She is newly motivated to succeed in a career, because that would allow her to support Harold without marrying him. This goal highlights that Sybylla truly does love Harold, but she is only willing to marry him as an act of compassion, not any desire to do so. As in Chapter 17, Sybylla is distracted from her dreams by the "little pleasures" of Caddagat. Her description of her ambitions as "wild" and "unattainable" also suggests that she doesn't see her hopes for a career as plausible.

A man from the post office at Dogtrap arrives at the estate and tells Sybylla that he is in need of men to help put out a fire. He has also brought her some letters. Sybylla ignores the letters because they are from her mother, who only writes to express hope that Sybylla is behaving well. The men of **Caddagat** are seven miles away, so Sybylla saddles her horse and rides to find them. She delivers the message and rides back to Caddagat. As she approaches, she takes in the beauty of Caddagat. *This*, she thinks, is her home.

Mrs. Melvyn has been absent from the story for a long time, and Sybylla does not grant this first mention of her with any significance. This, combined with the fact that Mrs. Melvyn is still concerned about Sybylla's behavior, indicates that the relationship between mother and daughter remains strained. Sybylla does not miss her family or Possum Gully because she sees Caddagat as her home. It is beautiful, and life there is easy and without hardship.

Aunt Helen and Mrs. Bossier are out walking when Sybylla comes back to the house, so she sits down to read a letter from Mrs. Melvyn. The letter informs Sybylla that she must "give up pleasuring" and "meet the responsibilities of life." Mr. Melvyn has fallen into deep debt to a man named Peter M'Swat, who will accept Sybylla's services as a governess to his children in place of the loan. Sybylla is horrified––she has heard of the "total ignorance" of Peter M'Swat's wife, and his home is rumored to be squalid and dirty.

Mrs. Melvyn describes Sybylla's life at Caddagat as "pleasuring" that allows Sybylla to neglect "the responsibilities of life." Mrs. Melvyn grew up at Caddagat, which gives this description more weight––she sees the estate as a false utopia removed from reality, and Sybylla now has to leave Caddagat to resume real life. The news of Mr. Melvyn is a reminder that the Melvyns' suffering has not stopped just because Sybylla is not there to witness it, which strengthens the idea that Caddagat is not a true sanctuary but a temporary escape from hardship. Sybylla is dismayed to think that she will have to leave the beautiful Caddagat and its cultured residents for "total ignorance" and squalor, which reiterates the importance Sybylla gives to beauty and refinement.

Sybylla grows angry that her mother has expressed no regret at Sybylla's situation. She believes that Mrs. Melvyn does not want her to enjoy pleasure, reflecting on past instances where Mrs. Melvyn indulged Gertie but not Sybylla. Sybylla blames this unfairness on her ugliness, since ugly girls generally lead joyless lives.

Hearing from her mother brings back Sybylla's insecurities and resentments, causing a sort of regression of Sybylla's burgeoning maturity. She once again paints her sister Gertie as the ideal daughter, lamenting the favoritism Mrs. Melvyn showed to the perfect Gertie. The happiness Sybylla has enjoyed at Caddagat vanishes, as she once again wallows in self-pity about her ugliness and the injustice of her life.

Sybylla refuses to go to the M'Swats. She begs Mrs. Bossier to let her stay, but Mrs. Bossier will not contradict a mother's wishes for her child. She agrees, though, to write to Mrs. Melvyn to ask her to reconsider. Mrs. Melvyn writes back quickly, calling Sybylla selfish and overly concerned with her own leisure. Mrs. Melvyn refuses to break her promise to Mr. M'Swat. Sybylla is devastated at having to leave **Caddagat**, her home, and Mrs. Bossier and Aunt Helen, whom she adores. In her remaining time, Caddagat seems to get only more beautiful, and the older Sybylla—who's narrating the story—reveals that she is crying as she writes about the place.

Once again, Mrs. Bossier's commitment to traditional values and convention stands in the way of Sybylla's wishes. Mrs. Bossier is willing to ask Mrs. Melvyn to reconsider the decision, which implies that Mrs. Bossier herself wants Sybylla to stay, but her respect for traditional family structures prevents her from helping Sybylla more forcefully. Mrs. Melvyn has no sympathy for Sybylla's desire to stay at Caddagat, since she is more practical than Sybylla and opposes the idea that Sybylla would prioritize her own happiness over the responsibility to family. As Caddagat loses its permanence in Sybylla's life, it becomes more beautiful, suggesting that its beauty comes in part from the contrast to the rest of Sybylla's life in the "real world."

Sybylla leaves **Caddagat** on a hot Wednesday afternoon. Aunt Helen kisses Sybylla's hand and tells her that everyone at Caddagat will miss her. She reminds Sybylla to stay positive and reassures her that things will be better than Sybylla imagines. As Sybylla leaves, she hopes Helen will miss her at least a little, and she wonders where Harold is.

Aunt Helen displays her aversion to cynicism by encouraging Sybylla to take an optimistic outlook. Sybylla, though, demonstrates her natural tendency towards insecurity and pessimism when she wonders if her family at Caddagat will miss her at all, right after Helen assures her that they will all miss her.

CHAPTER 27: MY JOURNEY

Frank Hawden drives Sybylla away from **Caddagat**, and the two of them part on good terms. When she gets on her second carriage, she leans out the window and waves to Hawden until he is out of sight.

Even though Sybylla's relationship with Hawden has been nothing but contentious, on her final day at Caddagat, she loses her grudge against him. He becomes not an entitled man, but a part of Caddagat itself. Just as the estate became more beautiful when Sybylla had to leave it, her opinion of Hawden takes on a rosy tint now that she is leaving him behind.

For the next leg of the journey, Sybylla rides in a large coach with sixteen passengers, of which she is the only woman. The other passengers are a diverse mix of races and professions, and they are all kind to her. Before they reach their destination, however, the horses tire out, forcing the passengers to walk the hilly route for miles in the heat. This irritates them, and they make many rude jokes and comments to the driver as they walk.

As Sybylla leaves Caddagat, she is thrust back into reality. Unlike at Caddagat, she lacks the company and protection of other women. She lacks the ease of life she was used to at the estate, as the horses tire out and the travelers are forced to walk. She is also confronted with more diversity than she ever saw at Caddagat, where she spent time primarily with wealthy relatives and guests and occasionally with laborers and traveling vagrants. But her experience on the journey is positive: the men are kind to her, and they include her in their jokes as they walk. This suggests that the utopia of Caddagat is not really so superior to the rest of the world––it's only simpler.

Despite the delay of the coach, Sybylla and her fellow passengers manage to catch their train. The men take special care of her: they get her ticket, save her a seat, and carry her luggage. Sybylla enjoys the rush of the train, which moves too quickly to give her time to linger in her thoughts.

The kindness and courtesy of the other travelers shows that good manners are not restricted to the educated classes. Sybylla tends to associate chivalry and other qualities of true manhood to the refined upper class, but each member of the diverse group of travelers behaves like a gentleman towards Sybylla.

When the train reaches Sybylla's stop, she thanks the men for their kindness, and they express their hope that some of them might meet again. The train pulls away, and Sybylla stands alone of the platform. She feels utterly alone. Mr. M'Swat picks her up at the platform, and they depart without a word to each other.

The swift shift from the jovial company of the travelers to the solitude of the train station, followed by the silent ride with Mr. M'Swat, foreshadows the loneliness that will overtake Sybylla in the coming chapters. The world outside Caddagat is not as universally negative as Sybylla anticipated, but she will have to face more hardship than she did in her sheltered life on the estate.

CHAPTER 28: TO LIFE

The older, narrating Sybylla prefaces the next events by revealing they are imprinted on her memory so permanently that not even the greatest poets could imagine enough "joy, fame, pleasure, and excitement" to erase it.

This warning from an older Sybylla prepares the reader for the drastic downturn of Sybylla's circumstances. It makes clear that whatever events are to come impacted her deeply, and she has yet to recover. Her remark that the greatest poet could not replace her misery emphasizes her belief in the power of literature, as she imagines that the only person who could come close to erasing her pain would be a great poet. The thought that even "joy, fame, pleasure, and excitement" couldn't ease her suffering also reveals the four aspects of life that Sybylla values most. The inclusion of "fame" alongside "joy" and "pleasure" indicates that life with the M'Swats did not rob Sybylla of her ambitions.

As Mr. M'Swat drives Sybylla to his home, she comes to like him. She considers him too different from herself to ever befriend, but she appreciates his common sense despite his ignorance and small-mindedness. M'Swat has known Sybylla's father since they were children because M'Swat's father worked on Mr. Melvyn's station as a blacksmith.

When Sybylla lived at Possum Gully, she described the life of a peasant as simple and ignorant. She was careful, though, not to disparage peasants themselves, since they are only adapting to their lifestyle. Her description of Mr. M'Swat is similar: she likes the man himself, but she cannot look past his ignorance enough to consider him an equal who she could befriend. The fact that M'Swat once worked for Mr. Melvyn also emphasizes how far the Melvyns have fallen in society.

Sybylla strives to take an optimistic view of the situation. She reasons that she was bound to face misfortune at some time, so that time might as well be now. She hopes M'Swat's home might not be as bad as she fears, and even if the family is dirty, she is certain she could introduce measures of cleanliness. But her hopes are dashed when the buggy reaches M'Swat's home at Barney's Gap.

In contrast to the cynicism of her youth, Sybylla tries to follow Aunt Helen's example and take an optimistic perspective. She accepts that her charmed life at Caddagat was never going to last, and she reassures herself that she can take measures to improve her circumstances when she gets to Barney's Gap. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation undermines her attempts at optimism.

The M'Swat residence is "desolate and prison-like," with no grass, an abundance of livestock, and eight children. Sybylla finds the children horribly dirty––not because they are poor, but because they are ignorant and unkempt. Mrs. M'Swat is "fat, ignorant, [and] pleasant-looking," and she greets Sybylla with a kiss. Mrs. M'Swat leads Sybylla inside, and Sybylla is disgusted by the squalor of the house. She longs to return to Caddagat.

Sybylla describes the M'Swat house as "prison-like," making clear she views her employment there as a jail sentence. She specifies that the M'Swat's dire living conditions come not from poverty, because they are not really that poor. They live in squalor simply because they are too ignorant to know that they could live with more cleanliness and culture. Mrs. M'Swat is the last model of womanhood that Sybylla meets. Like Sybylla, Mrs. M'Swat does not fit the 19th-century standards for an ideal woman. She lets her children run unkempt and keeps her house in disarray instead of exerting her authority over the domestic sphere. She is untidy and fat, which runs counter to Victorian beauty standards. However, Sybylla does not identify with Mrs. M'Swat, despite their similarities and the pleasant nature that Sybylla notices immediately on the woman's face. Mrs. M'Swat is ignorant, and Sybylla prizes knowledge too highly to subscribe to Mrs. M'Swat's form of womanhood.

Mrs. M'Swat serves a dinner that further disgusts Sybylla, all while two of the little M'Swat boys fight loudly. Mrs. M'Swat hits both boys on the head and finishes serving dinner. The M'Swat children stare at Sybylla wonderingly. She feels completely overwhelmed but manages to ask if she has now met the whole family. Mrs. and Mr. M'Swat say she has met everyone but Peter, their 21-year-old son who is out working.

Every new aspect of the M'Swats, from their food to their table manners, further demonstrates their ignorance and horrifies Sybylla. Although she is overwhelmed by her new life, she tries to be polite, grasping at rules of common courtesy to buffer herself against the lack of refinement.

After dinner, Sybylla writes to Mrs. Melvyn and Mrs. Bossier to inform them of her safe arrival. She plans to collect her thoughts before begging them to let her leave Barney's Gap. Mrs. M'Swat shows Sybylla to her bedroom, which is "fairly respectable," and once Mrs. M'Swat leaves, Sybylla locks the door and sobs. Her tears are coarse and uncontrolled, free from any manners or refinement. Finally, she controls herself and calls herself a fool for crying.

Though Sybylla's room is "fairly respectable," it cannot compare to her beloved room at Caddagat. Sybylla weeps, unconcerned with her mother's expectations of refinement. In a way, she is indulging in the same lack of manners that she dislikes in the M'Swats. Unlike the M'Swats, however, Sybylla restrains herself and returns to her manners, embarrassed by her outburst.

Sybylla resolves to explain her situation to Mrs. Melvyn and Mrs. Bossier, and she is sure that she will soon return to **Caddagat**. Later, Peter M'Swat, Jr. comes home, and Sybylla overhears a conversation between him and the other M'Swat children. They tell Peter that Sybylla is small and pale, with tiny hands, quiet feet, and fancy accessories. Mrs. M'Swat adds that Sybylla writes very quickly and uses big words that they can't understand. Peter responds to this in a surly tone, remarking that she will obey him no matter how pale she is. When Sybylla meets Peter, he leers at her. She is especially pleasant and deferent to him, and he gives her no more trouble.

Sybylla finds comfort by assuring herself that she will return to Caddagat. While Caddagat was once a home where Sybylla felt comfortable, now it has reached an almost mythical, heavenly status as the only place Sybylla can be truly happy. Sybylla's interactions with Peter M'Swat also mark a shift––this time, in the way Sybylla deals with men. She handled Frank Hawden's rudeness by confronting him head-on, driven by a combination of youthful recklessness and social status. Now that Sybylla is more mature and wields less social power, she resolves the issue with Peter by being overly polite to him. Peter's arrival also brings up another topic of privilege. The M'Swat children's fascination with Sybylla's pale complexion is likely because they are suntanned and freckled from spending too much time outdoors. However, Peter's resentment of Sybylla's paleness calls to mind issues of race, specifically of the privilege white Australians have compared to Aboriginal Australians. Race does not play a significant role in Sybylla's narrative, as she primarily interacts with other white Australians. This absence is notable in and of itself, though, since Sybylla is so interested in matters of injustice. The lack of attention she pays to racial prejudices, when she is so concerned with discrimination based on gender and class, suggests that even the most liberal white Australians of this era were often ignorant of the racial issues in their country.

That night, Mrs. M'Swat tells Sybylla to play a song for them on the piano. Sybylla is happy to obey, thinking that the piano can offer her comfort while at Barney's Gap. However, the piano has been warped by the dust, heat, and wind, and it makes only a terrible clanging when Sybylla tries to play it. When Mrs. M'Swat asks her to play the instrument anyway, Sybylla believes that the family has no idea what music is supposed to sound like. She pounds randomly on the piano keys, and the louder she plays, the more the M'Swats enjoy it.

Barney's Gap is so devoid of culture and art that even the piano, the one bright spot, produces only ugliness. Sybylla is disappointed, but the M'Swats are so ignorant in matters of culture that they enjoy the off-tune music. This only deepens Sybylla's resentment of her situation, but she obliges their request to keep on playing.

CHAPTER 29: TO LIFE (CONT.)

Mr. M'Swat gives Sybylla her first weekend off, and the days seem to stretch forever. On Sunday, Barney's Gap sees the only rain that comes for the entirety of Sybylla's stay. Sybylla spends the morning writing to Mrs. Melvyn and Mrs. Bossier, explaining the situation as calmly as she can. Mr. M'Swat can read a little, so he spends Sunday reading the local paper. He undertakes this reading with "utter soul-satisfaction" that would rival the enjoyment of a cultured man reading poetry.

Though Sybylla has a tendency for bursts of emotion, she retrains herself when she writes to her mother and grandmother, demonstrating that she is maturing. Every new aspect of Barney's Gap seems to worsen Sybylla's opinion of it. Even nature itself conspires against her, plunging the area into a drought that mirrors the drought of culture she faces at Barney's Gap. Mr. M'Swat's soul is satisfied with a local newspaper, while Sybylla craves poetry and art.

Sybylla looks for something to read, but the only books in the house are an unopened Bible and Mr. M'Swat's diary. She gets permission to read the diary and finds only a "drearily monotonous account of a drearily monotonous existence." Sybylla gives up on the diary and tries to converse with Mrs. M'Swat, but all the older woman wants to talk about is the weather.

The fact that even the Bible is unopened highlights just how little the M'Swats care for reading. Sybylla tries to quench her thirst for literature by reading Mr. M'Swat's diary, but it only cements that life at Barney's Gap is "drearily monotonous." The emphasis on monotony recalls Sybylla's boredom at Possum Gully. Her attempts to chat with Mrs. M'Swat also reflect the Melvyns conversations with local farmers at Possum Gully, since Sybylla was dissatisfied with their habit to talk about work the same way she is dissatisfied with Mrs. M'Swat's discussion of weather.

Sybylla has always been restless, even when she is busy, and now that she has nothing to, she can only sit still and torture herself by imagining what might be happening at **Caddagat**. She continues this habit as she starts her duties the following Monday, since her work takes up less than half of her day. Mrs. M'Swat organizes the daily chores so that she can spend most of the day in bed playing with her infant child. In addition to household chores and childcare, Sybylla teaches the children in a separate room set apart as both a schoolroom and a storage space.

Sybylla remains restless and ambitious, but now Caddagat has taken the place of her aspirations. She dreams not of the "brilliant career" she could have in the future, but of returning to the happy days of her past. Sybylla's responsibilities as governess also mimic in some ways the responsibilities she might take on as a mother, and her extreme dislike of this work indicates that she was right to think that raising Harold Beecham's children would depress her.

Sybylla posts her letters to her mother and grandmother, and every mail-day she hopes for a response. No answer comes until three weeks later. Mrs. Bossier has written Sybylla, saying that she wanted to write earlier but didn't want to interfere between Mrs. Melvyn and Sybylla. She encloses a letter from Mrs. Melvyn, which assures Mrs. Bossier that Sybylla is exaggerating her struggle and that working at the M'Swats will tame her. Mrs. Melvyn has also written directly Sybylla; she tells her that she must put up with the situation and be polite for the sake of her family's reputation. She asks if the M'Swats mistreat Sybylla and then reminds her daughter that she has always been a good mother. She says Sybylla should help Mrs. Melvyn by putting up with the situation.

Mrs. Bossier repeats her intention not to interfere with a conflict between mother and daughter, but in a way she escalates this conflict by showing Sybylla what Mrs. Melvyn has said about her. Mrs. Melvyn, who never understood Sybylla's rebellious spirit, hopes that working for the M'Swats will force Sybylla to become a more traditional woman. In her letter to Sybylla, Mrs. Melvyn makes clear the Melvyns are still preoccupied with the family's reputation, as she requests Sybylla be polite to the M'Swats for the sake of the family pride. She asks Sybylla if the M'Swats mistreat her, revealing at least some concern for her daughter's wellbeing, but she proceeds to guilt her daughter into remaining in service by reminding Sybylla of her responsibility to help her mother.

Sybylla, furious at her mother's lack of sympathy, tears up Mrs. Melvyn's letters. She and he mother have never sympathized with each other––Mrs. Melvyn is practical, ladylike, and has no ambitions to leave the world she was born in. She sees Sybylla as a rebellious child possessed by evil spirits that must be driven out, and she believes that disciplining Sybylla is her maternal duty. Mrs. Bossier will not rescue Sybylla either, since the Bossiers are so disdainful of Mr. Melvyn that they have little sympathy for his family.

Sybylla is able to see her mother's perspective, though she still resents Mrs. Melvyn for her lack of sympathy. What Sybylla sees as a lack of care, Mrs. Melvyn sees as a method to shape her daughter into a woman who can fit into the world. Mrs. Melvyn fails to understand that Sybylla does not want to fit into the world, since Mrs. Melvyn herself has never had any ambitions beside the domestic ones of a traditional wife and mother.

Sybylla decides to bring the M'Swat residence up to her standards. She asks Mr. M'Swat to fence the house to keep out the animals, but Mrs. M'Swat shuts this down because the animals need to eat the kitchen scraps. Sybylla suggests tuning the piano, but the M'Swats think the piano already makes a good noise. She suggests tidying up the children, but Mr. M'Swat says that dressing his children up like "swells" will make him a pauper like Mr. Melvyn. All the M'Swats look down on Sybylla's father, which gives them a lack of respect for her and undermines Sybylla's attempt to teach the children table manners.

Sybylla decides to bring the M'Swat residence up to her standards. She asks Mr. M'Swat to fence the house to keep out the animals, but Mrs. M'Swat shuts this down because the animals need to eat the kitchen scraps. Sybylla suggests tuning the piano, but the M'Swats think the piano already makes a good noise. She suggests tidying up the children, but Mr. M'Swat says that dressing his children up like "swells" will make him a pauper like Mr. Melvyn. All the M'Swats look down on Sybylla's father, which gives them a lack of respect for her and undermines Sybylla's attempt to teach the children table manners.

Sybylla writes again to her mother, only to receive another unsympathetic reply. She writes a letter to Aunt Helen, who always understood her. Sybylla is hurt by Helen's reply, which states that life is full of trials. After a year, Helen says, Sybylla might come back to **Caddagat**. Sybylla takes this answer as a betrayal and writes as much in a response to her aunt, who never answers the letter and has ignored Sybylla ever since. Sybylla wonders if friendship can be real when even Helen, "best of women," could quarrel with a suffering child.

Sybylla is reaching adulthood, yet none of the women who have modeled womanhood for her have presented a version of it that she wants to take on. Aunt Helen came the closest to being a suitable role model, but with this letter, even she lets Sybylla down. Helen's optimism is unhelpful and unrealistic to Sybylla's current predicament, and Sybylla views her harsh reaction to Sybylla's response letter as a cold rejection of a child in need. Losing faith in Helen makes Sybylla even more despondent, as she can no longer look up to the person she saw as the "best of women."

The M'Swats' previous governess did not discipline the children at all, so they are completely wild and do not respond to discipline. Sybylla has trouble asserting her authority, especially since the children consider her the daughter of "the damnedest fool in the world." She does not tell Mr. M'Swat is often away working for days at a time, and the children take these opportunities to torment Sybylla. When M'Swat leaves for three weeks, the children get so bold that Sybylla hits the leader, Jimmy, with a switch. Immediately, he and the other children begin to scream until Mrs. M'Swat bursts in and scolds Sybylla. After this, Sybylla promises herself she will conquer the children or leave by any means necessary. If life continues as it is, she might take her own life.

The M'Swat children disdain Mr. Melvyn, and that disdain extends to his daughter Sybylla. They have no qualms about calling Mr. Melvyn a fool to Sybylla's face, which highlights their disrespect toward her. The children's casual use of "damn," which was a more significant swear word at that time, also adds to their characterization as undisciplined and unruly. Sybylla is quickly losing patience with the children, but even corporal punishment does not succeed, because Mrs. M'Swat objects to any perceived cruelty toward her children. The constant disrespect from the children, combined with a lack of literature, has a severely damaging effect on Sybylla's mental health. Her threat of suicide escalates the situation dramatically, showing just how desperate Sybylla is to escape the M'Swats.

The next day at lessons, Jimmy is purposefully disobedient. Sybylla again strikes him with a switch. The children begin to scream, but Sybylla threatens to beat them all if they continue. Mrs. M'Swat rushes in, and Sybylla announces her readiness to take on Mrs. M'Swat. Sybylla believes that all people are equal because everyone has a strength that makes up for their weaknesses, so even though Mrs. M'Swat is stronger than Sybylla, Sybylla is bolstered by her superior intelligence. She forgets her family's dependence on the M'Swats and sees Mrs. M'Swat and herself only as two human beings. Mrs. M'Swat turns and leaves, and a defeated Jimmy sheepishly returns to his lesson. After this, the children obey Sybylla.

Sybylla is so tired of the children's behavior that she puts her employment and her family's financial stability at risk. She not only disobeys Mrs. M'Swat by physically disciplining Jimmy, but she threatens to fight Mrs. M'Swat as well. Sybylla recognizes later that she is acting against her family's interests, but in the moment, she forgets the larger implications and only regards herself and Mrs. M'Swat as two equal individuals. Previously, Sybylla's egalitarian views have been distant from her personal life, remaining in the realm of the philosophical. Now, she applies them directly to her own situation, showing that her worldview can adapt and inform her behavior.

CHAPTER 30: WHERE IGNORANCE IS BLISS, 'TIS FOLLY TO BE WISE

Mrs. M'Swat sends Sybylla and one of the M'Swat girls, Lizer, to visit the neighbors. Sybylla likes them better than the M'Swats because their house is clean and they are kind, but she is disappointed that the neighbors live the same slow life with the same small ideas as the M'Swats. The girls of the neighboring family tell Sybylla that Barney's Gap is a horrible, dirty place, and Mrs. M'Swat is a filthy creature. Sybylla never speaks against Mrs. M'Swat, but she resents that the life forced upon her is one that horrifies even these girls with no ambition.

Sybylla's encounters with the neighbors reveals that the M'Swats' flaws are specific to them and not due to their class. The neighbors are much cleaner and more reasonable, though Sybylla is still unable to find a friend who shares her lofty goals and ideas. Sybylla demonstrates some respect for the M'Swats and her position in their household by refusing to speak against Mrs. M'Swat, but her frustration continues to grow as she becomes the object of pity for the small-minded girls she considers herself distinct from.

Mrs. Melvyn insists Sybylla write to her regularly, so every week Sybylla writes a letter complaining about Barney's Gap. In turn, every week Mrs. Melvyn replies that Sybylla should be thankful for room and board. Sybylla knows that many girls would gladly swap places with her, but these girls are of a different temperament than she is.

Sybylla again distinguishes between herself and ordinary girls. By making the distinction, she is able to recognize her privilege while at the same time rejecting it as privilege. Mrs. Melvyn's insistence that Sybylla should be grateful classifies her as this "other" type of woman, whose temperament is fundamentally different from Sybylla's.

Sybylla's brother Horace writes her a letter asking why she doesn't give up writing to their mother, since doing so only frustrates both Sybylla and Mrs. Melvyn. Sybylla's letters make Mrs. Melvyn more determined to leave her at Barney's Gap, where Sybylla might become more practical. Horace is jealous that Sybylla gets to live away from home; he is tired of their father and the slow life of dairying. Sybylla takes her brother's advice and stops writing Mrs. Melvyn, though she continues to correspond with Mrs. Bossier.

Horace's letter provides a look into life at Possum Gully, since Mrs. Melvyn prefers to discuss Sybylla's life than her own. Horace shares some of Sybylla's frustrations with the monotony of life as a laborer, which are compounded by his resentment of their father. He calls into question the wisdom of continuing to write to Mrs. Melvyn, since doing so only entrenches both women more firmly in their respective positions. Sybylla actually sees Horace's point and takes his advice.

In her letters, Mrs. Bossier tells Sybylla that Harold Beecham is leaving Sydney for Queensland. She wishes Sybylla would make the best of her situation; the dullness means Sybylla has no temptations she needs to resist, so her stay at Barney's Gap will likely help her reputation. Mrs. Bossier also sends Sybylla a copy of an illustrated magazine that includes portraits of Australian singers. Sybylla thinks one of the singers, Madame Melba, is beautiful, and she describes the woman with great admiration to the M'Swat children. They don't believe Sybylla about Madame Melba's career, claiming that no one would pay a woman to sing.

Sybylla and Harold continue to drift apart: while she is stuck at Barney's Gap, Harold is exploring the country. In her letters to Sybylla, Mrs. Bossier makes clear that she shares the Melvyns' concern for reputation, and she believes that Sybylla's time at Barney's Gap will improve her reputation. Though Mrs. Bossier clearly does not understand how dire Sybylla's mental health is, the magazines she sends demonstrate an understanding of Sybylla's interests and passions. Sybylla enjoys the magazines, but the M'Swat children don't believe the stories about Madame Melba. They insist that a woman could never make a career singing, unknowingly belittling Sybylla's dream of becoming a singer.

Sybylla is surprised that none of the M'Swats have heard of Madame Melba, but she also envies their ignorance. They are like ducks in a duck pond, while Sybylla is like a duck in a desert, never reaching water outside her dreams.

Sybylla envies the M'Swat's ignorance because it prevents them from aspiring to unreachable heights. Like ducks in a pond, the M'Swats know only the limited world around them, so they do not want anything else. Sybylla, on the other hand, always feels out of place. She has a longing for something that would make her feel at home, but she can only achieve that goal in her dreams.

CHAPTER 31: MR M'SWAT AND I HAVE A BUST-UP

The monotony of life at Barney's Gap is agony to Sybylla. At night, she slips out of the house to sit under the stars. She sings songs from **Caddagat** and tries to relive every hour she spent there until emotion overwhelms her and she prays. Mr. M'Swat suspects Sybylla of sneaking out to see a lover because the idea of a girl going out to stargaze and dream is impossible to him. Sybylla does not try to explain; she assumes that a soulless man like M'Swat would consider her mad.

Caddagat continues to serve as a tantalizing dream for Sybylla. She characterizes Caddagat with the songs she sang there, emphasizing its status as a place of music and art. Though she has frequently spurned the existence of God, her longing for Caddagat is so strong that Sybylla starts to pray. In her despair, her description of Mr. M'Swat becomes more resentful. She calls him soulless for his lack of wisdom and culture, and she believes that he could never understand that a girl might have dreams.

Peter M'Swat has a sweetheart a few miles away, and he often goes out to visit her. One night, he returns from one of these visits and sees Sybylla outside. He slows his horse so Sybylla can walk beside him, but he does not dismount. Sybylla reflects that Peter is not rude, he is simply ignorant. This is why he allows Mrs. M'Swat to labor while he sits and smokes. He is not unmanly; he is just acting out the only manliness he knows.

In the same way that Mrs. M'Swat presents a model of unwomanly womanhood, Peter M'Swat offers a model of unmanly manhood. He lacks Harold's chivalry and replaces it with ignorance. Like Mr. Melvyn, he fails to fulfill his duties to his family––he lets Mrs. M'Swat toil while he relaxes. Unlike Mr. Melvyn, though, Peter's behavior is not selfish; it simply doesn't occur to him to behave otherwise.

Mr. M'Swat approaches Sybylla about her sweetheart, telling her both that she shouldn't sneak out to meet men and that she shouldn't make any advances toward Peter. Sybylla is dismayed and disgusted by the idea of marrying Peter––she has some respect for him, but she views their lives as so incompatible that their only similarity will be death. Sybylla explodes at M'Swat, calling him impertinent to even suggest she might have interest in a boor like Peter. She tells him she goes out at night to escape his terrible home, and spitefully assures him that making a bit of money has not made M'Swat a gentleman. She demands M'Swat never discuss Sybylla as an option for marriage with anyone in the area, and then she storms to her room, where she weeps.

Sybylla does not dislike Peter, but she is so disgusted by the M'Swats' lifestyle that she snaps at Mr. M'Swat for even suggesting she might want to be part of it. Her notion that even the most alien lives will share similarities in death is a bleaker version of Sybylla's democratic view of humanity; whether rich or poor, male or female, all people are equal in death. However, Sybylla briefly pushes against her own egalitarianism. She falls into elitist ideas of Old Money and New Money when she tells M'Swat he has failed to become a gentleman, and by calling him impertinent, Sybylla suggests that she holds higher status than M'Swat, despite him being her employer.

Sybylla fantasizes about running away from Barney's Gap, but her love for her siblings at home keeps her there. If Harold Beecham were to appear, she would accept his proposal with no conditions. She thinks of him as gallant and princely, and far superior to any men she sees at Barney's Gap. Mrs. Bossier mentions Harold in a letter to Sybylla on Easter, and her description makes it clear that Harold still intends to marry Sybylla when she is 21.

Though Sybylla often expresses jealousy toward Gertie, she does love her siblings. Because of this, she remains employed at Barney's Gap, despite her misery. Where once a married life was her worst nightmare, now she would accept Harold at once if he came for her. Just like she sees everything else at Caddagat as superior to Barney's Gap, Harold too is a superior man. Harold is not planning to swoop in and rescue her, but he still plans to be married once Sybylla turns 21.

Life at Barney's Gap is draining the life from Sybylla. She often cries through the night instead of sleeping, and the neighbors describe her as sorrowful and delicate. She feels guilty for snapping at Mr. M'Swat, who in his own mind was only behaving in a fatherly way, so she apologizes to him. Sybylla also tells M'Swat that she is already engaged, but she asks him to keep this a secret, and he agrees.

Sybylla was once so rambunctious and wild that her mother worried she would never mature into a proper woman. Now, her depression has put her in a delicate constitution, and her fearlessness is replaced by constant tears. After the heat of the moment passes, she recognizes that she treated Mr. M'Swat badly. This mirrors Sybylla's argument with Harold, when she snapped that she would never marry him before regretting her actions. Despite Sybylla's changing nature, some of her habits remain the same. And, just as Harold forgave her, M'Swat responds to Sybylla kindly, which suggests that she has judged him too harshly.

Sybylla does not consider herself superior to the M'Swats––in fact, she thinks their morality, practicality, and good natures make them superior to her. She is especially impressed at Mrs. M'Swat's ability to bear children year after year without complaint. But despite her respect for the M'Swats, the lack of mental stimulation they offer Sybylla is hurting her soul.

Sybylla manages to overcome her misery enough to recognize that she doesn't really dislike the M'Swats. She envies the qualities that make them suited to lead practical lives with kindness and humor, and she sees that Mrs. M'Swat is not as unwomanly as she first thought. In fact, Mrs. M'Swat may be more womanly than Sybylla, since Sybylla struggles to raise children and loathes the idea of giving birth. But even as she realizes the best features of the M'Swats, she cannot reconcile herself to life at Barney's Gap.

CHAPTER 32: TA-TA TO BARNEY'S GAP

As the months pass, Sybylla grows unhealthier, until Mrs. M'Swat finds her in bed suffering a breakdown. The M'Swats call for a doctor, who prescribes bedrest, and the M'Swats are very worried for Sybylla. They do not understand the cause of her illness and attribute it to the amount of work she has been doing. Mr. M'Swat writes to the Melvyns, and they respond that a neighbor can bring Sybylla home if she comes to Goulburn.

Sybylla's mental health has reached its limit, and her depression takes a physical toll. The M'Swats don't understand why she is sick, but their genuine concern for her displays their kindness and their care for Sybylla. The Melvyns, on the other hand, do not even care for Sybylla enough to bring her home from the M'Swats––she has to make her own way to Goulburn, and even then a neighbor will come pick her up.

The knowledge that she is leaving Barney's Gap revives Sybylla. Despite her relief, she thinks she will miss the M'Swats, since the children have come to like her. She promises to write to them and assures Mrs. M'Swat that she will tell Mrs. Melvyn that Sybylla's illness was not Mrs. M'Swat's fault.

Though Barney's Gap was as horrible as she feared, Sybylla ultimately disproved her initial impression of the M'Swats, which led her to believe she could never befriend them. She has not formed profound bonds with the family, but they all like her and Sybylla finds herself liking them. Part of her belief that she will miss the M'Swats may be due to the fact that they will miss her––Sybylla is, as always, desperate to be loved and missed by anyone.

As Mr. M'Swat escorts Sybylla to the train, he tells her Mr. Melvyn does not need to worry about his debt. Sybylla thanks him, and Mr. M'Swat says that there is no good being alive if people don't help each other. He bids her farewell and recommends she put off marrying her fiancé until he can get a bit of property.

Mr. M'Swat first seemed to be an unintelligent lout, but his parting words to Sybylla reveal his compassion and his wisdom. He relieves the Melvyns of their debt and espouses a simple but meaningful worldview: the only reason to be alive is to help other people. The fact that it is Mr. M'Swat who imparts this wisdom highlights that Sybylla isn't the only one who has philosophical ideas. His following advice, that she wait to marry until Harold can buy land, also suggests that practicality and wisdom are not mutually exclusive.

CHAPTER 33: BACK AT POSSUM GULLY

Sybylla returns to Possum Gully. Mr. Melvyn barely greets her, and Mrs. Melvyn doesn't mention Sybylla's stay at Barney's Gap except to remark that Sybylla managed to find a worse place than home. But Gertie and Sybylla's other siblings welcome her home with excitement. Sybylla is relieved to be home, relishing the clean house and her mother's refined, ladylike character. Her siblings have grown, and though Sybylla senses discontentment in them, they are not cursed with her unattainable ambitions.

After years away, Sybylla returns to find her family has hardly changed. Mr. Melvyn is still too caught up in himself to pay her any mind, and Mrs. Melvyn is only frustrated at Sybylla's constant dissatisfaction. Despite this chilly reception, Sybylla appreciates her mother's refinement, which was so lacking at Barney's Gap. Sybylla's siblings missed her, and Sybylla notices that they have become discontent with the monotony of Possum Gully. That discontentment has not escalated to an ambition as strong as Sybylla's, however, which means she is still isolated to some degree within her own family.

In Sybylla's absence, Mr. Melvyn has broken down and given in entirely to alcoholism, which Sybylla describes as selling his manhood for beer. Mrs. Melvyn privately confides to Sybylla that she wishes she had never married; her husband is a failure and Mrs. Melvyn fears her children will be the same. That night, Gertie also tells Sybylla that she is ashamed of their father, who spends all their relatives' money on fancy clothes instead of paying his bills. Gertie is tired of keeping up respectability. Sybylla falls asleep thinking that parents' duty to their children is even greater than children's responsibility to their parents.

Sybylla associates Mr. Melvyn's complete loss of respectability with a loss of manhood. Now that he is focused only on alcohol, he willfully neglects his duties as the man of the house, and all the manners that once made him a gentleman are gone. Mrs. Melvyn is so distraught by this, she opens up to Sybylla with surprising vulnerability, though she ends the conversation by suggesting Sybylla will end up a failure like her father. It is striking that Mrs. Melvyn, the most ladylike and responsible of all Sybylla's role models, regrets her marriage. This suggests that Sybylla is right to fear marriage, as it binds women to men who are not similarly bound to keep up their masculine responsibilities. Gertie is also troubled by Mr. Melvyn's behavior. His habit of spending money on clothes indicates that Mr. Melvyn remains overly concerned with appearances, just as the M'Swats believed he was. Sybylla is disappointed in her father. She challenges the traditional belief that children owe service to their parents, and posits that parents should instead help and protect their children.

Being among her siblings revitalizes Sybylla, and Mrs. Melvyn wants her to return to Barney's Gap. Sybylla refuses, and though Mrs. Melvyn tries to both coerce and persuade her, Sybylla will not give in. Mrs. Bossier offers to take one of the children to **Caddagat** to help the family, and Mrs. Melvyn sends Gertie. Sybylla reflects that Gertie, the pretty sister, will be among her kindred in a land of pleasure. Sybylla, meanwhile, remains at Possum Gully and continues a monotonous life.

Mrs. Melvyn fails to understand how damaging Barney's Gap was for Sybylla, but Sybylla knows herself and refuses to go back. When Mrs. Bossier again opens Caddagat to one of the Melvyn children, Mrs. Melvyn sends Gertie. This only amplifies Sybylla's envy of Gertie, though she has to admit that the perfect Gertie will be at home at Caddagat.

Sybylla finds pleasure in the organ music that churches play on Sundays. The music brings her great joy and makes her wish she could devote herself to Christianity. She longs for "a religion with a heart in it," instead of a cold, unfeeling religion that prioritizes respectability and lets poor people die in the shadows of the great cathedrals of the rich.

The lack of any music at Barney's Gap has taught Sybylla to find joy in simple melodies, like those of the church organ. Her discussion of church leads to her satirizing religion. She describes Christianity as heartless, undermining its reputation as a religion of charity and forgiveness and characterizing it instead as a performative religion that prioritizes displays of wealth over the lives of the poor.

Sybylla does her best to perform her duties. She has no books, only "peasant surroundings," "peasant tasks," and "peasant ignorance." She believes that being ignorant is the only way to be content and being content is the only way to be happy, but she doesn't see a purpose in this way of life. Dreams still come to her that spark her ambition, but she represses them until longing becomes despair.

Sybylla's world has become smaller: she dwells in "peasant surroundings," undertakes "peasant tasks," and her lack of literature threatens to push her into "peasant ignorance." She recognizes that ignorance can lead to happiness, but she cannot give up her desire for a greater purpose. Instead of pursuing a purpose, though, she represses her ambitions. In this way, she chooses ambitious despair over ignorant happiness.

CHAPTER 34: BUT ABSENT FRIENDS ARE SOON FORGOT

Gertie initially sends many letters from **Caddagat**, but she sends fewer as time goes on. Mrs. Bossier mentions in one of her own letters that Gertie is much less wild than Sybylla, and very popular for her good looks. Sybylla still misses Caddagat, but Gertie's letters imply that the residents of Caddagat do not miss Sybylla.

Gertie's letters about Caddagat do not comfort Sybylla; they only emphasize how far away Sybylla is from the one place she considers home. Though Sybylla worships Caddagat as her far-off utopia, the residents of Caddagat have taken to Gertie just as they did Sybylla. This reawakens Sybylla's insecurities about her lovability compared to her sister, and Caddagat becomes another reminder of the lack of love in Sybylla's life.

A few months later, Sybylla receives several letters from **Caddagat** informing her that Harold Beecham has moved back to Five-Bob Downs with his fortune intact. An old sweetheart of Harold's father left her wealth to the son of her lost love, and Sybylla is struck by how like a piece of fiction that seems. Her relief that Harold does not need her to save his finances makes Sybylla realize that she does not love him. She thinks that now that Harold is rich, she is free from her obligation, and he will have his choice of beautiful women.

Harold's experience with poverty is much shorter than Sybylla's, and regaining his fortune requires little effort on his part. Sybylla's remark that Harold's luck seems like a piece of fiction emphasizes her literary mindset, while also poking fun at the contrived nature of the story itself. Now that her marriage to Harold will not be an act of support for a fellow pauper, Sybylla realizes she does not want to go through with the wedding. She assumes this won't be an issue, since now that Harold is rich, he can have his pick of many more desirable women.

Sybylla writes to Harold, and he responds that he will come to marry her within the month now that he has his fortune. Sybylla rips his letter in two and drops it in the fire. She knows he is a determined man, and since he made up his mind to marry her he will not think of doing otherwise. But Sybylla "see[s] what he could not see himself": that Harold is likely bored of Sybylla and is becoming enamored by Gertie's beauty.

Once again, Sybylla convinces herself that Harold does not love her. She is disappointed to learn that she can't get out of the marriage as easily as she hoped, but her assumption that he has fallen in love with Gertie conveys that she is disappointed to have lost Harold's love. Of course, she hasn't lost his love, but Sybylla believes that she can "see what he could not," implying that she knows Harold better than he knows himself.

Sybylla writes back to Harold in a formal letter. She tells him he is free of obligations to her, and she hopes he will choose someone better for him. As she sends the letter, Harold seems far away––"the shadow of a former age." Harold writes back, confused, and asks Sybylla to explain. When she does, he writes her a short, impersonal letter, which says he has "sufficient manhood" to stop him from taking his frustration out on her. He does not ask for Sybylla's reasoning.

Sybylla's experience at Barney's Gap has forced her to mature, and her happy, youthful romance with Harold seems "the shadow of a former age": a remnant from her youth at Caddagat. Sybylla, who loves to express herself with words, indicates her lack of interest in Harold by keeping her language terse and formal. Harold mimics this when he accepts her rejection. His reference to having "sufficient manhood" speaks to Harold's journey to define manhood as he grows up, which has run parallel to Sybylla's own journey of maturity.

As Sybylla reads Harold's final letter, her image of him becomes clearer. She imagines sitting with him in an orchard and watching rage settle over him as he reads her rejection. She insists Harold will soon get over "a woman, a girl, a child! as weak and insignificant as I." When they meet again, Sybylla is sure that they will laugh at their youthful foolishness.

Sybylla is so convinced that she knows what Harold is thinking that she believes she can imagine his reaction to her letter perfectly. She belittles herself by calling herself "a girl, a child," which is similar to the language she used when making fun of Frank Hawden for his marriage proposal. As she assumes she knows Harold's thoughts, Sybylla thinks he will come to see her in the same negative light she sees herself.

Sybylla's romantic notions of love have vanished, like all her other dreams. She has not realized how close she came to loving Harold until she grieves the loss of him in her life. The best thing in life is knowing that somewhere in the world there is "an individual to whom our existence is necessary." The only people who can devote so much of themselves to each other are husband and wife, and Sybylla has thrown away the chance to make that connection. But as Gertie's letters reveal she and Harold are growing closer, and Mrs. Bossier and Aunt Helen come to approve of the match, Sybylla knows she has made the right decision. Still, she is bitter that love has proven to be exclusively for the beautiful and that she will forever be a lonely "alien among her own kin."

Sybylla does not want to marry Harold, but she still craves love, and she has given up her best opportunity at securing it. She has matured past romantic notions of wild, passionate love, and she now defines love as feeling that someone's "existence is necessary." This description is simple yet profound, which speaks to Sybylla's growth. Gertie and Harold grow closer, and Sybylla's assumption that he will fall for her sister seems to be validated when Mrs. Bossier and Aunt Helen also see the potential for a match. Despite her maturity, Sybylla cannot help but envy her beautiful sister, as Sybylla resigns herself to a life alone. Her description of being "an alien among [her] own kin" highlights Sybylla's fear of being eternally misunderstood, which she now believes has come true.

Sybylla worries for her younger brother Horace, who has grown frustrated of the slow life at Possum Gully and is leaving the family home to work for their uncle. Sybylla watches him go and is miserable that she has failed to save him from her own "sparsely furnished existence." She often quarreled with Horace, but he was the only one who ever stood up for Sybylla in family arguments. She misses his presence in the house.

Sybylla sees some of herself in Horace, who is tired of the monotony of Possum Gully. But Horace does not pursue a "brilliant career," instead trading a life of labor at Possum Gully for a life of labor at their uncle's house. Sybylla feels guilty that she couldn't help Horace achieve something greater than her own life. Sybylla cherishes beauty in all its forms, so her description of her life as "sparsely furnished" demonstrates how empty and unappealing she finds her existence.

CHAPTER 35: THE 3RD OF DECEMBER 1898

The day is very hot, and all the Melvyns are exhausted from the heat and their labor. Sybylla thinks as she works that hard labor is the life of herself, her parents and everyone around them, and if she is "a good girl" who "honour[s] her parents," her reward will be many years of this life.

Now that she is back at Possum Gully, Sybylla has returned to a life of weariness. Sybylla is a young adult now, but since she still lives with her parents, her primary role is as daughter, which requires her to "honour her parents." Thus, her familial obligation is to be a "good girl," not a "good woman," since a woman's role would be as a wife or mother. She muses about the pointlessness of this life––she remains ambitious, but the only future in sight is many more years of weariness.

Sybylla's work is interrupted by the sudden arrival of Harold Beecham. He approaches her without recognizing her, and when he does recognize her, his eyes fill with pity. This offends Sybylla, who is prone to self-pity but is too proud to accept it from others. She greets Harold coldly and brings him inside, imagining how Harold must think himself foolish for ever loving her.

When Harold first met Sybylla, he mistook her for a servant. Now, on their final meeting, Harold again fails to recognize Sybylla. When she notices his pity, Sybylla takes offense. She acknowledges her hypocrisy, given her habit of self-pity, but she still hates to see that pity present in Harold. Her embarrassment causes her to be cold and distant to Harold, and she once again assumes to know all the terrible things he must think about her.

Sybylla brings Harold to her mother, and she is glad she has never felt any humiliation on behalf of Mrs. Melvyn. Despite Mrs. Melvyn's patched gown, the mending work that surrounds her, and her "peasant surroundings," Mrs. Melvyn is a lady, and she looks it. Sybylla leaves Harold with Mrs. Melvyn and goes to the kitchen, where she wallows in the pain of dreaming above her position.

Like Sybylla, Mrs. Melvyn is also stuck in "peasant surroundings." Repeating this description draws similarities between Sybylla and her mother, which strengthens Sybylla's claim that she has never been embarrassed of Mrs. Melvyn. Though Sybylla often resents her mother, she is proud of Mrs. Melvyn's unwavering status as a lady. When she leaves Harold to speak with Mrs. Melvyn, Sybylla laments the suffering her unattainable ambitions have brought her.

Mrs. Melvyn finds Sybylla and tells her to clean herself up while Mrs. Melvyn serves Harold tea. Sybylla finds her pretty younger sister Aurora, who Sybylla considers her own because Aurora obeys her, and Sybylla in turn worships Aurora. Sybylla watches Harold and Mrs. Melvyn through a hole in the wall, and she pauses to consider that men aren't such terrible creatures. Women make Sybylla more conscious of her poverty than men do.

While Sybylla envied Gertie for her beauty, Aurora is young and obedient enough that Sybylla does not feel threatened by her. As Sybylla eavesdrops on Harold and her mother, she reconsiders her opinion on men. Even this late in the story, Sybylla's perspectives on gender are still evolving, which suggests that coming to terms with gender roles and expectations can be a lifelong task.

Keeping an eye through the hole, Sybylla sends Aurora to give Harold a message. Aurora obediently invites Harold to meet Mr. Melvyn and Sybylla's brothers, and Mrs. Melvyn gives them directions to where the men are working. While they are gone, Sybylla prepares herself for tea and sets up a room for Harold. When Aurora and Harold return, Sybylla is in a better mood. She feels that, as on their first meeting, she is the master of the situation.

When Sybylla and Harold first met, Sybylla gained the upper hand in the situation by confusing Harold about her identity. This time, she feels like the master of the situation because she is able to control where Harold visits on the property and how he sees her.

Sybylla greets Harold with more friendliness, and he recalls that she was working outdoors when they first met. He says that girls are only civil to a man when they are dressed up enough to stun him. Sybylla playfully tells him to shut up, and Harold remarks that it is just like old times. Sybylla sighs, "Like, yet unlike."

Harold and Sybylla often swap jokes about how men and women behave, and Harold is happy to resume that banter even after so many years apart. When he comments that their conversation is just like old times, he makes clear that he wants their relationship to be like it was before. Sybylla, though, describes their relationship as "like, yet unlike" how it used to be––that is, their jokes are the same, but the rejected marriage proposal has fundamentally altered their relationship.

CHAPTER 36: ONCE UPON A TIME, WHEN THE DAYS WERE LONG AND HOT

The following day is Sunday, and Sybylla walks with Harold to church. She knows the appearance of a gentleman like Harold among the local farmers will cause a stir, and she feels proud to be alongside "a man who is a man." She introduces Harold to a group of men, and she leaves him to sit with the women. The women all ask about Harold, assuming he is Sybylla's sweetheart. She brings him to the women, noting that he is impressive to both men and women: women admire his size, gentleness, and wealth, and men admire his manliness.

Sybylla is not as caught up in appearances as her parents, but she still feels a sense of pride to go to church in the presence of a gentleman. Her description of Harold as "a man who is a man" highlights that he has not shared Sybylla's difficulty in defining himself as an adult. He is firmly a man, while Sybylla still teeters between the roles of girl and woman. Harold's manliness is impressive even to other men. He is impressive to women, as well, which suggests that a man who is sure of his manhood is appealing to everyone.

When they return to Possum Gully, Harold tells Sybylla he wants to speak to her, and he thinks she knows why. Sybylla also thinks she knows, and knowing makes her bitter. She expects him to say that he was wrong and she was right––he has found someone he loves better, and that person is Gertie. It pains her to think that the only man who ever even pretended to love her is going to retract that love, and she laments that she is so different from other girls. But then she thinks of Gertie, who is so pretty and innocent, and Sybylla understands why Harold would prefer Gertie to a "common little bush-girl" like herself.

Once again, Sybylla presumes to read Harold's mind. Sybylla often goes back and forth between longing to be like other girls and wishing other girls were more like her, but as she comes to believe that Harold has fallen for perfect, traditional Gertie, Sybylla longs to be as normal as her sister. Her insecurity is apparent as she believes Harold is the only man who even pretended to love her, which is patently false, after Hawden, Everard, and Goodchum all flirted with her at Caddagat. She describes herself as a "common little bush-girl," and the reference to the bush is a reminder of Sybylla's status as an Australian peasant.

To Sybylla's surprise, however, Harold has come to ask her to marry him. He misinterprets her surprise as offense, and he says he knows she is too proud and clever for him, but he loves her. Sybylla clarifies that she is not insulted, but she thought he wanted to marry Gertie. Now Harold is insulted. He exclaims that Gertie is only a baby, and he asks if Sybylla really thought he was that sort of man. Sybylla answers that she did not think he was that sort of man, but she thought that was the only sort of man there is.

Harold proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Sybylla cannot predict his actions––he has come to Possum Gully with precisely the opposite intent that she expected. Her belief that Harold wanted to marry Gertie is entirely unfounded. Gertie is close to Sybylla's age, but she has not gone through the trials that brought Sybylla into maturity. As such, Harold only sees Gertie as a baby. Sybylla is startled by the notion that not every man shares the same values and attractions, since she assumed that Gertie was universally appealing to any man.

Harold is stunned. He only ever took her letters of rejection as playful teasing, and he only ever saw Gertie as a little sister. Sybylla claims Gertie is beautiful and much more lovable than Sybylla could ever be, but Harold doesn't care about that. Beauty is easy to come by, he says; he wants someone true.

Not only does Harold want to marry Sybylla, but he never stopped wanting to marry her. He does not care about the flaws she sees in herself or about the inferiority she feels in comparison to Gertie. He just wants to marry Sybylla.

Sybylla wishes that she loved Harold "as [she has] it in [her] to love." She is weak, and she wants a man strong enough to help her through life's suffering, and that kind of strength can only come from suffering the way she has. She knows she can never marry Harold. She tells him that he should marry a woman who is good for him, who all men will like, who is "conventional" and "will do the things she should at the proper time."

Earlier, Sybylla said that she loved Harold as much as she was able to love, giving the impression that her capacity for love is limited. Now, though, Sybylla recognizes that she is very much able to love, but she doesn't love Harold "as [she has] it in [her] to love." She was going to marry Harold to help him through life's suffering, but now that his suffering is over, she wants a husband who can help her *through that suffering. She believes Harold should marry someone easier to manage than she is. Her description of a "conventional" woman who "will do the things she should at the proper time" is a contrast to Sybylla's repeated description of herself "doing "things [she] oughtn't at the time [she] shouldn't."*

Harold tells Sybylla that he wants to marry *her*, and though she regrets saying "nasty and unwomanly" things to him, she still believes Harold should marry a better woman. She tells him that she likes to write stories, which she believes no man could accept in a woman. Harold tells her he would be happy to let her write, if she will marry him, but she still recoils from his touch. She is ashamed and feels unworthy of his reverence.

Sybylla regrets being "nasty and unwomanly." The fact that she sees these qualities in herself highlights that she is not yet finished maturing into a woman, which is part of the reason she believes Harold should find a better wife. She tells him of her aspirations of writing, assuming that this will upset him, but Harold proves again that Sybylla underestimates him. Still, she pulls away, believing herself unworthy of his worshipful love.

Harold grows angry, asking if Sybylla hates him so much she cannot bear to touch him. Sybylla tells him that she is fond of him and wishes he could understand. He insists he will be good to her, and he offers her everything she could want––but she knows marrying him will mean an end to her independence. Sybylla knows Harold means what he says, but the man she will love "must know, must have suffered, must understand."

Sybylla needs her husband to be a true partner, and for that to be the case, he needs to have suffered through the same hardships she has. Her fear of being misunderstood has transitioned into a desire *to be understood, which in turn has combined with her need to be loved. Harold has already proved that he does not understand her, since he doesn't understand why she is rejecting him and why she won't let him touch her.*

As Harold begs Sybylla to become his, she wonders if it is worth waiting for this man who understands her—a man she might never find. Harold is virile and charming, and for a moment she considers agreeing to marry him. But then she takes his feelings into consideration and realizes that only a masterful man could render her harmless. If she marries Harold, Sybylla will always resist him. She again denies Harold, and though he tries to convince her otherwise, she will not be swayed.

Sybylla considers marrying Harold. After all, a marriage to a man she likes but does not love might be better than waiting her whole life to fall in love with a man she might never meet. She makes her decision by considering Harold's feelings, which demonstrates how she has grown less selfish as she's matured. A marriage to Harold could never be a partnership. She would always assume he was trying to conquer her, and she would always resist those attempts. Such a marriage would not only make her miserable, but it would also ruin Harold's chances of happiness as well.

That night, Sybylla considers the temptation of Harold's offer. He would lift her from a life of poverty, a life from which marriage is probably her only escape. Sybylla believes marriage is a "sensible and respectable arrangement" for ensuring the population continues, and she is willing to be married, but only to someone exceptional. Her "latent womanliness" makes this fact so clear to her that she writes a letter to Harold.

As Sybylla thinks over Harold's proposal, she views marriage as a social maneuver rather than a symbol of love. Her description of marriage as a "sensible and respectable arrangement" emphasizes that marrying Harold would be an act of practicality, not of love. She also believes that a primary purpose of marriage is to continue the population, and Sybylla has no interest in being a mother. She is not a fully-formed woman, but "latent womanliness" does lie dormant inside her, and it is that womanliness that guides her. Positioning womanliness as the voice of reason challenges the sexist belief that women are hysterical, irrational creatures who need men to make their decisions.

In the letter, Sybylla explains that she has made up her mind to refuse his proposal, but she does care for him and is happy to know she has been loved. She believes Harold's feelings for her are only a passing fancy, and though she does not think him fickle, his manliness prevents him from the depth of feeling that women experience. She says that he will easily find a better bride, and when that time comes, he will be happy she set him free.

Fittingly for an aspiring writer, Sybylla expresses her thoughts to Harold much more easily through the written word. When she was younger, Sybylla believed that her depth of feeling made her different from other girls like Gertie. As a young woman, she recognizes that deep feeling is in fact a hallmark of womanhood, and it is only men who do not experience it. Due to men's inherent shallow emotions, Sybylla genuinely believes that Harold will soon be happy she set him free from their engagement.

After she writes the letter, Sybylla goes to Aurora's room and hugs the little girl so she can feel "something living and real and warm." Sybylla cries, wondering if she will ever find a companion who can show her the meaning of the tragedy of life, or if she will always be alone. She wishes to be good and pretty like other girls, instead of a woman who brings no pleasure to anyone around her.

Sybylla knows she has given up her best chance at love, but she still desires it. She hugs Aurora to feel "something living and real and warm" as a solace from the cold practicality she has had to adopt when assessing the situation with Harold. She expands on her hopes for a husband, describing someone who can teach her the meaning of the tragedy that is life. This adds depth to her wish for a man who has suffered and understands, since only someone who has suffered tragedy can find its meaning. Once again, Sybylla longs to be more like other girls. Instead of calling herself useless, she accuses herself of bringing no pleasure to anyone, suggesting that Sybylla thinks she has neither a practical nor emotional purpose.

CHAPTER 37: HE THAT DESPISETH LITTLE THINGS, SHALL FALL LITTLE BY LITTLE

Sybylla gives Harold her letter as he leaves. She watches him go, and her life seems to stretch out before her like the barren road Harold rides along. She knows that she has better fortune than millions of other people, but knowing the troubles of others does not make one's own suffering easier.

As Harold rides away, Sybylla compares her life to the barren road. Harold was her last prospect for a possible future. With him gone, she has no way of knowing what her life will become. Throughout the story, Sybylla has acknowledged that she is more fortunate than many other people, as if to preemptively silence readers who might have that same criticism. Here, she explains why she feels her own feelings are valid, despite the various privileges she enjoys: knowing that other people have worse lives does not make her life better.

Mrs. Melvyn chastises Sybylla for not paying attention to the laundry, and when Sybylla accidentally breaks a cup, Mrs. Melvyn scolds her at length. Sybylla notes that the type of life in which a broken cup warrants a lecture is the uneventful, narrow life she is opposed to. Sybylla remembers a time her mother was all "gentleness and refinement," but years of labor, poverty, and neglect from Mr. Melvyn have weighed heavily on Mrs. Melvyn.

Even with her future uncertain, Sybylla knows she wants more from life than panicking about a broken cup. Mrs. Melvyn once lived a more interesting life, one that allowed her to retain the "gentleness and refinement" that characterize a proper lady. Sybylla blames her mother's exhaustion not only on the hard work of farming, but also on the way Mr. Melvyn has mistreated her. This might be another reason Sybylla is reluctant to marry: she has seen the impact a bad husband has on her mother.

Sybylla wishes she and her mother understood each other. She wishes she shared Mrs. Melvyn's orthodoxy, or that Mrs. Melvyn shared her ambition. But Sybylla's need for passion and motion is beyond Mrs. Melvyn's understanding, just as Sybylla cannot grasp Mrs. Melvyn's piety, cheerfulness, and "heroic struggle" to run the family.

Sybylla doesn't hate her mother, but she doesn't believe their relationship can be salvaged. They are too different to ever understand each other. However, Sybylla's description of her mother makes clear that she respects Mrs. Melvyn. She views Mrs. Melvyn's attempts to keep the family afloat as a "heroic struggle," which contrasts the many times Sybylla acknowledged herself as an unconventional heroine.

If lives were told through music, some would be played by great orchestras, and others common pianos or penny whistles. Sybylla believes that her life could be played by nails jangling in a rusty pot. She wonders why she writes, and why anyone writes. She has described her life, and she hopes to make a purpose of it. In the meantime, she is the member of her family who waits outside pubs to help her drunken father. What does it matter, she thinks, if it makes her more bitter and godless?

Sybylla's tendency toward self-deprecating humor returns as she claims that the story of her life—which her audience is nearly finished reading—is worthy of no instrument greater than nails in a pot. She muses about the purpose of writing and the purpose of her life more broadly. She hopes to find a greater purpose one day, but as of now, her purpose is to help her father back from pubs. This task weighs on her emotionally, but at least it is a purpose.

Sybylla receives letters from Gertie and Mrs. Bossier informing her that Harold has left Five-Bob Downs to travel the world. Mrs. Bossier and the rest of Sybylla's family wonder why Harold visited Possum Gully, since he never proposed to Gertie, but Sybylla never answers that question.

Sybylla set Harold free, and he has taken that opportunity to leave the country entirely and expand his horizons. Sybylla respects his privacy, and her own, by keeping the details of their engagement a secret.

CHAPTER 38: A TALE THAT IS TOLD AND A DAY THAT IS DONE

Through a poem, Sybylla reflects that though others suffer more than she does, she is still full of longing and regret. It is now March 1899, and Sybylla does not know what the future holds. She is weary. She writes, "Time rules us all. And life, indeed, is not / The thing we planned it out, ere hope was dead; / And then, we women cannot choose our lot." As time churns on, hope becomes a distant memory of the past.

In this final chapter, Sybylla intersperses prose with poetry, which represents her experimentation as a writer and foreshadows a possible literary career. She describes aspirations and ambitions as nothing but fodder for lost hope, and she asserts that life does not follow the plans people set and that women especially "cannot choose [their] lot." The notion that "Time rules us all" unifies humanity as an oppressed class under the tyranny of Time, which prevents people from making their lives what they want them to be.

On this night, Sybylla is overtaken by "the abject littleness" of her life. What is the point of ambition, she thinks, when everyone must die? Her heart is weary, and it aches not like a young heart crying out for battle, but an old heart that has been defeated. She craves only rest.

Sybylla once enjoyed life's little pleasures, but now she is horrified by her life's "abject littleness." "Abject" describes the most extreme degree of something negative, and applying it to the "littleness" of life magnifies the power of that littleness to rob Sybylla of her spirit. She has reached the level of weariness she feared when she first started working at Possum Gully––her ambitions have been replaced with a desire to rest.

Sybylla snaps herself out of her pessimism and speaks more broadly. She is proud to be Australian, and grateful to be a peasant. Peasants are the backbone of the nation, while the rich are "parasite[s]" who profit from "human sweat and blood and souls." Sybylla pronounces her love for the Australian workers, who can suffer through the worst tragedies and still emerge cheerful. She loves, too, the female peasants, and she wishes she was more worthy to be one of them. She proclaims her desire to help them, but her own life is bound to the same labor. She is only a commoner, and only a woman.

Sybylla rejuvenates herself with her patriotism and political ideals. She expresses her love of her country, and her pride at being an Australian. Even though she has complained about life as a peasant throughout the novel, Sybylla is grateful to count herself among the class she respects the most. Her description of the upper classes as "parasite[s]" clarifies the subtextual disdain for the wealthy that Sybylla has expressed since childhood. The rich earn their fortunes from "human sweat and blood and souls," but the humans who sacrifice for those fortunes, the peasants, still manage to remain cheerful. Then Sybylla calls out specifically to the female peasants, an oppressed group within *an oppressed group. Though she has complained about their ignorance and wished for peers who shared her ambition, Sybylla closes her story with an expression of reverence for female peasants. She makes no attempt to inflate her own status, acknowledging that she is simply a commoner and a woman.*

Sybylla watches the sun set over the horizon. She appreciates the gumtrees, the kookaburras, and the mopokes. As the sun goes down, Sybylla expresses her love and good wishes for her readers and tells them goodbye. She finishes her story like a prayer: "Amen."

Sybylla takes in the beauty of the natural world. She loves beauty, and even if she is no longer surrounded by the refined, elegant beauty of Caddagat, she can still find beauty in the landscape of her beloved Australia. She references flora and fauna specific to her country––gumtrees, kookaburras, and mopokes––and watches the sun set over them all. She bids goodbye to her readers directly, emphasizing how personal this story is. Then, despite her self-professed atheism, Sybylla offers her narrative to God, the only being who might be able to help a simple female peasant achieve a brilliant career. With her story concluded, Sybylla finishes, "Amen."

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Smith, Tucker. "*My Brilliant Career.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 14 Dec 2022. Web. 14 Dec 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Smith, Tucker. "*My Brilliant Career.*" LitCharts LLC, December 14, 2022. Retrieved December 14, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/my-brilliant-career.

To cite any of the quotes from *My Brilliant Career* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Franklin, Miles. My Brilliant Career. Penguin Classics. 2007.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Franklin, Miles. My Brilliant Career. New York: Penguin Classics. 2007.