

kangaroo* in full speed followed by a female and two joeys,* one of the latter half-grown; and after these she showed a possum,* perfectly done, crouched on the limb of a tree. For this there was part of the tree-trunk, some leafage, and a melon-shaped moon at the back. Continuing she did the wiggle-waggle line* that means a snake, and followed that with a kookaburra,* a peewee,* a crow, and a spiky thing which I had not seen before but which was an echidna. Last of all she made a man and a woman, the man straight down both sides, the woman widened at the hips. The work was done with the utmost rapidity, and without the alteration of a single line.

My mother criticized the man and woman as drawn, and showed how it should be done in *our* way. The blacks said contemptuously of the figures that those were not men and women, adding that they were only clothes, and clothes were not people.

After that, for my benefit, the women imitated birds. They brought the kookaburras, crows, magpies, and the peewees all round the trees, and had some of the smaller birds fluttering about us from the bushes. One they caught by hand as it darted past, giving it to me to hold, but my hands were inefficient and it got away. There was hardly a local bird that was not imitated. We could not have done it; our vocal cords were trained on a different scale, our ears untrained to a bird-note and its strange intervals.

I never saw Flora again, for soon after this the secret unofficial leave for "extermination" came from Sydney. From that time on, the blacks were fugitives.

Notes
Flora

Katharine Susannah Prichard

N'GOOLA*



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

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

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

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

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

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

Mary had little to do with the wild, gypsyish crew which foregathered there, although she was friendly with most of the older men and women. She lived on the outskirts of the settlement. Her husband, a man of her own colour, often sneered at her for trying to live

like a white woman: keeping her home clean and tidy and herself respectable, as she had been taught to in a mission school.

Her home was not far off: a humpy, squat and dark, built of rusted kerosene tins and old scraps of timber, with a roof through which the rain poured in winter. But the land where the humpy stood belonged to her. Mary prided herself on that. She had bought it with money earned doing washing and scrubbing in the township: money hidden and saved for years. Her children had grown up and drifted away from her. She lived and worked now to get a house built on her land: a small wooden house with a roof of corrugated iron.

A few geraniums and tomato plants wilted in the dry sand of what she called her garden. Mary's eyes lingered on them lovingly before she opened the door and went into the one room of the humpy.

Vexed to find her husband had left scraps of food and unwashed dishes littering the table, she put down her shopping bag and cleared them away; lit a fire on the open hearth swept the floor, washed the dishes, cup up the meat and vegetables she had bought to make a stew, and put them in a pot on the fire. Ted would be coming in soon for a meal, she expected, although often on a Saturday night he was too drunk to do more than sprawl on the bed and sleep until morning.

Her tidying done, Mary went to the door, wondering whether the old man she passed on the track had gone down into the settlement. She wished she had not been so sharp with him. Glancing back along the track, she saw that he had made himself a little fire on the brow of the hill. She could hear him singing to himself in a dreary, monotonous voice.

Why had he asked about a girl by her native name? No one would know that. Most of the girls in the settlement would not remember if they ever had a native name. They were all Jeans and Janeys, Kittys and Dulcies, these days.

"N'goola." Mary was disturbed by something vaguely familiar in the name. She seemed to have heard it before, but when and where she could not remember.

Sunset was searing the sky. Mary sat down on a box near the door, tired after her day's work. Her thoughts strayed over the many evenings she had sat like this watching the sun set and soothed by the quiet, despite a vile smell which filled the air, coming from the dilapidated building on the hill top where the filth of the district accumulated for treatment.

Because of it, Mary reflected bitterly, a stretch of arid country was the only place, in all the hundreds of miles this side of the ranges, where people of the native race were permitted

to meet and live together. Here on the low hillsides surrounding a depression which was a swamp in winter but dry and hard in summer, a score or so of families had built shacks like her own. For the most part, mere hovels of rusty tin and bagging, they looked like rotten mushrooms thrust up from the ground.

Mary could see a twist of smoke rising from some of them, and children running about the huts; toddlers quite naked, and other youngsters in coloured rags. Half a dozen women squatted beside a clump of bushes playing cards. Round the two-up ring* on the flat, a crowd of men and women milled* crazily, making their last bets before the light failed.

"N'goola! N'goola!"

The word was like a fly in Mary's brain. Hauntingly, irritatingly, it clung to her, making her feel uneasy, stirring confused memories. Who was she? Where had she come from? She had no idea—unless there was something in what an old woman said when she was visiting sick natives in hospital. The old woman had been delirious and dying when Mary stood beside her.

"Yienda* Port Hedland girl,"* she exclaimed. "Bulyarrie,* same me."

"How do you know?" Mary asked.

The old woman had mumbled a word or two about ants and a mark on her forehead. Afterwards, in the settlement, Mary was pleased to say that she came from Port Hedland and belonged to the Bulyarrie group in tribal relationship, but she never mentioned to Ted, or any white people, the secret elation it gave her to think she belonged somewhere, and to somebody.

Dull red, like the ochre used in rock drawing,* was burning out behind the rim of the hills. Dusk gathered and lights sparkled from huts on the hillside.

"N'goola! N'goola!"

Mary was startled to hear the old man singing in a southern dialect. She had learnt many words of it from Blind Nelly: hearing her talk, listening to her songs and stories about the birds and animals which were once men of the *nyoongar*.*

*Little one, Little one,
Little lost one,
Child of my dreaming,
Where are you?
Long and far has Gwelnit wandered,
Calling and searching.
Now his bones are weak,
His eyes dim,
The end of the journey is near.*

Like that, it went, the weird crooning and wailing, on and on, over and over again. Mary listened intently as the old man droned away. His voice was muffled, then it rose, crying so piercingly: "N'goola! N'goola!" that Mary jumped to her feet.

She walked quickly to where the old man was sitting beside his fire. He looked at her with dazed, bleary eyes when she stood before him in the firelight.

"Who is she, this N'goola?" she asked.

"My daughter."

The old man stared at her, his face heavy with the grief that had gone into his singing.

"Yienda?"

"Mary. I live with my husband, over there."

"Wongi* woman?"

"Yaller-biddy."*

The old man caught the rasp in her voice.

"N'goola, yaller-biddy," he murmured.

"Tell me about her." Mary sat down on the ground opposite to him. "Bulyarrie, me."

The old man nodded, deep lines in the worn leather of his face relaxing to her respect for tribal custom as if it were a bond between them.

But she wanted no bond with this dirty old man, Mary told herself, in a quick revulsion of feeling. She had lived too long among white people to go back to Aboriginal ways and ideas. Why had she mentioned her tribal group? Was it in case they might be in a forbidden relationship? To put him at his ease? Or on an impulse she could not restrain?

A more aloof dignity in the old man's bearing intimated that he understood what she was thinking. Instinctive awe crept into Mary's sympathy as she looked at the broad, dark face in its dejection and sorrow.

Light from the fire glimmered in his eyes as they met hers. It struck a dull red band under the shaggy grizzled hair standing up from his forehead. Tattered his shirt might be, and his faded dungarees might show patches sewn on with black shark's teeth; * but Mary knew he was a man of importance in the tribe from which he had come.

"N'goola is my daughter—and not my daughter," the old man said. "I am a man of the Wabarrrie tribe, *waich bronga*.* Gwelnit, the name my fathers gave me. Jo Moses, what the white people called me. They found me in the reeds of a creek after a fight with white men. Many of my people were killed. The *boujera** of my people lies in the far south, along the Kalgan River."*

Gwelnit could speak the language of the white people as if he had known no other, Mary realised; but he reverted now and then to his own dialect, or to the slipshod half-and-half way the natives of various tribes spoke in the settlement.

This was the story he told her with many meanderings into the past.

The wife of a pioneer in that southern district had taken the native baby who was one of the few survivors of his tribe and reared him with her own son. The lads grew up together learning to be horsemen and stockmen. When young Jack Winterton went north to take up land beyond Port Hedland, Gwelnit went with him. He had become head stockman on Djeeral cattle station, won a woman of the tribe there in a fight with spears, and lived with her in the native camp.

Old men of the tribe were hostile to white people. Although they clung to the belief that the spirit of a child came to its mother through a rock, pool or animal, impregnated with the vitality of remote ancestors, they had decided that the association of their women with white men weakened the tribe. They foresaw that it would die out, as so many tribes had done, if they did not safeguard their women. Experience had taught the old men that light-coloured babies resulted from intercourse between native women and white men, and light colour was considered a sign of weakness in a child. For this reason women of the tribe were forbidden to give their bodies to white men.

With fierce pride the women showed-off their babies, delighting in the glossy darkness of their skin. None had been more fierce in her pride than Mittoon, Gwelnit's woman, when she bore him sons whose skin was as deeply bronze as his and her own.

Then she gave birth to a daughter. The old women tending her were suspicious when they saw the child, and Mittoon overwhelmed by shame and rage. Gwelnit knew she had done what was forbidden when he, too, saw the baby. His anger rose because his woman had brought this disgrace upon him, a stranger in the tribe, yet of pure blood; a man her kinsmen had come to trust and admitted to all rights. But Mittoon's anger had been greater than his.

"'It was the Boss,' Mittoon said." The old man's voice trembled to the shock of remembering. "'When you were away on the bullock muster, Gwelnit, I went to the big house for stores. He took me into the store-miah* and shut the door. Nothing would come of it. No one would know, he said. Now there is this child to shame me. Aie! Aie!'"

Gwelnit had spent happy years with his woman. She had been slight and girlish when he practised throwing spears to win her from the man of another tribe to whom she was promised. She grew full-bosomed and handsome; he never doubted her loyalty to him and to the tribe. What disturbed him most was that the man he had served faithfully for many years should have brought this trouble upon them.

"The child will not live," Mittoon said in her anger," the old man mourned. "Our people must know I was forced by the white man. Soon they will forget what has happened." Gwelnit had stood looking at the baby in the *coolamon*; * its delicate limbs of yellowy-brown, the black lashes curled up from sleeping eyes, tiny hands. He remembered that once he had been a little creature like this—and as helpless. His anger left him.

"She is my daughter," he told the old women. "See that she is well-cared for."

The old women knew what that meant. A man had the right to claim any child born by his woman. They dared not disobey Gwelnit.

Mittoon brooded sullenly over his decision. She refused to take any notice of the baby. Her breasts were heavy with milk but she would not feed the child.

In the evening when Gwelnit returned from work on the run or in the stockyards, he would find Mittoon squatted on the ground outside the *wurley*. * Inside, the baby wailed fretfully. He would lift her, wash her, and stand over Mittoon while she suckled the little one. Every morning and night, he did that; and every morning and night he and Mittoon quarrelled about the child.

N'goola, he called her, because she was like a small brown and yellow flower which grew along the creeks and in the swamps of his *boujera*.

Gwelnit warned Mittoon that if she did not feed and care for N'goola he would take the child away. Mittoon's anger and jealousy smouldered because Gwelnit's eyes glowed when he looked at the child, and darkened as they turned to her, Mittoon, his woman.

When Gwelnit returned from work, one evening, there was no wailing in the *wurley*. Mittoon sat outside, as usual, sullen and brooding.

Gwelnit looked into the *wurley*. The *coolamon* was empty. "Where is N'goola?" The fear that moved him then vibrated in the old man's voice.

"The ant people have got her', Mittoon had said. "The yellow one will disgrace me no more'."

Gwelnit seized her in his fury.

"Where did you put her?" he demanded.

Mittoon would not say. Not until she was terrified and bleeding from his blows, did she cry:

"On the ant nests ... near the Big Rock'."

Gwelnit dashed away through the scrub. Darkness had fallen and he had to find a track through the mulga * and thorn-bush * which led to the Big Rock ten miles away. Then he ran, ran with the speed of his emu brothers. His brain was bursting; his breath could hardly drive him along when he came to the open country on which the Big Rock stood, with the dumps of ants' nests scattered out from it.

The moon was rising as he searched among them, stopping now and then to listen for any sound; but there was no frail cry to guide him. At last he found her, lying on her back; a little yellow body to which swarms of black ants were clinging, sucking at her eyes and mouth, every moist hidden fold of her limbs.

Gwelnit took her in his arms. She was still alive, still breathing, but so faintly that he could not believe the ant people had not already taken her spirit. He brushed them from her, plucked them from her eyes and mouth, and from the broken skin on her forehead into which they were burrowing. He had nothing to revive her except his own spittle. He put that in her mouth.

Quickly, carefully, he carried her back along the track, stopping again and again to put his mouth to hers and listen for the sound of her breathing.

When he confronted Mittoon with the child in his arms, he said:

"If N'goola does not live—Mittoon will not."

Mittoon took the baby. Its mouth was too weak to suck. She squeezed her nipples so that the milk fell drop by drop into N'goola's mouth. The madness which had come over her man, Mittoon could not understand.

His pity and tenderness for the little one were strange also to Gwelnit. Was there some magic within her that had melted the marrow of his bones? Had the spirit of by-gone ancestors in her eyes won him?

Gwelnit watched to see Mittoon did everything necessary for the child. There was no need to watch, he realised after a while, because Mittoon feared he would kill her if N'goola died.

The old women exclaimed because the ants had not eaten the little one's bones dry; and because she had not perished of thirst lying out in the sun all day. But she was strong, his N'goola, Gwelnit exulted: she had the will to live. He rejoiced as she

grew. When she was a little girl, she had been as quick and graceful as a bird, N'goola. He was proud of her: proud when she could run to him and call him *mumae*.*

With a quivering under her skin, and a quickening of her senses, Mary heard the old man describe how, when N'goola was playing with other children in the camp, sometimes, they would call her "the yellow one;" and how she would fly at them, scratching and shrieking, until the mothers came and tore her away.

N'goola burnt quandongs,* mixed the black dust with grease, and rubbed it over her body. But it was no use. The other children laughed and teased her more than ever for trying to look like them.

Mary could see it all, the little girl smeared with greasy black dust, and the naked, dark-skinned children dancing round her, jeering and driving her to a frenzy; then a big man coming out from the trees, shouting angrily at them, taking the little girl in his arms and washing the black stuff from her body. What was it he had told her? That colour of the skin did not matter. She must laugh and have courage to be a good member of the tribe. Then everybody would forget that an evil spirit had frightened her mother and stolen some of the baby's skin colour before it was born.

There was a song he had sung to comfort the child; a song about a flower, brown and yellow, which grew in far-away country. Blind Nelly, too, sang this song. It told about two children who had wandered away into the bush and were lost, until their mother found them, following the scent of the *n'goola* they had picked and carried about with them.

"N'goola was six years old when a mounted trooper rode into the camp and took her away." The old man's voice drew Mary's attention back to his story.

Gwelnit was mustering cattle in the back hills when it happened. N'goola had been accepted by the tribe, then. Her gaiety and nimble grace were pleasing to the old men. They had given her a place in tribal organization. When Gwelnit returned, Mittoon wept and howled because she thought Gwelnit would blame her for letting the trooper take the child; but every man and woman in the camp was angry and indignant at the way the trooper had seized N'goola, tied her hands together, bound a handkerchief over her mouth, and ridden away with her.

Gwelnit saddled a horse in the Boss's yards and rode off to the police station in the Port.*

The policemen laughed when he told them he had come to enquire why they had taken away his daughter.

"She's not your daughter," the tall trooper said. "You're black as the ace of spades, and she's a half-caste. Our instructions are to remove half-caste children from the native camps and send them south to learn the ways of white people in government institutions and mission schools."

Gwelnit cursed the white people in his rage and grief.

"Where have you sent her?" he asked.

The police would not tell him.

"The idea is," the trooper said, "to keep the kid away from natives so that she can forget she ever had anything to do with them."

Gwelnit left the police station distraught by the disaster which had befallen him and N'goola. From other natives in the township he learnt that she, with other little girls like her, had been put on a boat going south the day after she had been brought to the police station. Gwelnit was on the next boat going south.

On the boat he talked to one of the seamen. It would be hard to discover where the child had been sent, this man said. There were Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, Methodist and other "homes," in outlying suburbs of Perth,* which received a subsidy from the government for looking after half-caste children.

Gwelnit made the rounds of all of them, enquiring for N'goola; but no one would tell him anything about her. Nowhere could he find her.

Mary's mind seethed with the conflict which had arisen within her. Had the old man made her see and feel what his will contrived for her to see and feel? Or was it true that she was "the little yellow one" other children had jeered at in the native camp? Even if it were true she would not admit it, she told herself. She was sorry for the old man; but, after all, she was half white. He was not her father! her father had been a white man.

People in the settlement said she was "a crawler to the whites." But she crawled to nobody, Mary thought resentfully; neither to them nor to the whites.

Her sympathies were all with the dark people. She had learnt hymns and poetry at school, but they did not move her like Blind Nelly's songs, or the fragments of corroboree * songs and stories old Aboriginal men and women told in the settlement.

Yet she had struggled so long to win for herself the right to live like a white woman in a real house, and to be regarded as a decent person, and she could not give up the struggle now. It had taught her to be stubborn and independent. So far nothing else had come of it. She could not get permission even to build a

new house on her block of land. It would never be granted, she was sure, if she allowed this old man to call her his daughter and took him to live with her.

Gwelnit's voice drew and held her again.

He had wandered to the north and to the east in his search for N'goola; to the cities and townships white men had built everywhere. On gold-mining camps and out-back stations,* on native reserves and in ports along the coast, he had begged for news of N'goola. Nobody could tell him anything about her.

For twenty-five years he had wandered, up and down, all over the country looking for her, calling her name. Now he was old; he could walk no further. This settlement near what had once been a corroboree ground for south-west tribes, he feared, was the last place he would reach.

"If no one has seen or heard of N'goola, here," he said from the depths of his weariness and despair, "I will return to the *boujera* of my people, and wait for the spirits of my fathers to come for me."

The old man moved back from the embers of his fire when he had no more to say. Their glow touched the deeply furrowed, weather-beaten bronze of his face.

His eyes went past Mary, unwilling to meet hers. He gave no sign of having sensed what he had done to her, lifting a shroud from her mind, and stirring in her that conflict between her desire to live like a white woman and her loyalty to the traditions of the dark people.

She knew, all the same, he was aware of her desire to leave him without a word which would unite her with him and his quest.

Silence hung between them: a silence, heavy and oppressive. Mary broke it.

"You need wander no further, *mumae*," she said. "I am N'goola."

THE HAPPY FARMER

A child was practising, his fingers jogged gaily over loose keys of the old piano.

Hot sunshine filled the kitchen of Three Trees farm. Flies swung in it, drowsily, and settled on the table covered by a piece of worn white oil-cloth. They clung to the cups and plates set out for a meal. A fire in the stove added to the heat with the peaty smell of smouldering mallee* roots.

On a chair beside the open window, a woman lifted the nipple of her withered breast to the mouth of a baby in her arms. The

baby wailed fretfully, twisting away. The mother's face writhed to that small sick cry. She gazed at the child anxiously, then out of the window.

A row of sheds staggered through the bright light: a harness and machinery shed, feed-room, milking shed and stables. Rough-barked saplings barred the tawny-buff of wheatfields flowing into the thin grey-blue of the sky beyond.

Beside the stable-yard, a man was harnessing horses to the reaper and binder. A tall, one-armed man in faded khaki trousers, a dingy shirt and weather-worn felt hat. He stood on one leg, lifted the heavy horse collar to his knee, flung it round the horse's neck, caught the hames' strap* with one hand and fastened it with his teeth. The huge, shaggy working horses jostled against him. Two of them he had already wrestled into position against the battered red and yellow of the machine. The third had still to be brought into line. A small boy, eight years old or thereabout, was holding the horse.

When his father took the horse and backed him in alongside the team, the little lad and a youngster beside him watched curiously. The big bay, wall-eyed and bad tempered, was always more trouble than any of the other horses for their father to handle.

The woman at the window saw her husband lift the heavy horse collar with his foot: but Wall-eye was restive this morning, bumped Tom and sent the collar flying. Billy ran and picked it up. He could just lift and hoist the collar on to his father's knee again. Would Tom make the child try to hold the horse? Usually, nowadays, Billy stood on a box to fasten the hames' strap while Tom held the horse, though it irked him unbearably to let Billy help at all. For ten years, he had managed his horses without help, proud to demonstrate that he was a better farmer with one arm than most men with two.

But the last few months had altered all that. Tom realised he was fighting for his farm, his family, the means of existence itself. He fought for them as he had never fought for himself. His life was bound up with the life of his farm. The seasons, and the price of wheat, had played fast and loose with his toil, as they had with the toil of hundreds of other men.

Every farmer in the district had fallen behind in the payment of interest on his property to the banks. Some men he knew had been evicted from their holdings. But it looked like being a good harvest this year. Tom, in a desperate effort to make the most of it, had driven his wife and children to work with him in every possible way.

All the same, there, on the mantelpiece, was the long envelope with a typewritten letter inside, intimating that he and