Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DORIS PILKINGTON

Doris Pilkington Garimara was born in 1937 at the Balfour Downs Station near Jigalong, her family's ancestral home. As a young girl, Doris and her baby sister Anabelle were removed from their home while their mother, Molly, was in the hospital recovering from an appendectomy. They were sent—just as their mother had been—to the Moore River Native Settlement in order to be "properly" educated and kept isolated from their indigenous family. Molly joined her daughters at the camp, but after just a year there she absconded from the camp once again, with Doris's younger sister Anabelle in tow. Doris was left behind with her aunt Daisy—who had, just like her sister Molly, been sent back to the camp as an adult. Doris grew up believing that her mother had given her away, and the truth emerged in snippets as she grew into adulthood. Working as a nurse and raising six children, Doris began to compile her aunt's stories (and, eventually, once they were reunited in the 1960s, her mother's) and composed a series of books describing the torment of the Stolen Generations—the children of Australian Aboriginal descent, especially children of mixed race, who were removed from their families by Australian government agencies and forced into internment camps. *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* is Garimara's best-known book, having been adapted into a 2002 film starring Kenneth Branagh. Garimara passed at the age of 76 in Perth, Australia, due to complications from ovarian cancer.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of The Stolen Generations is a long and violent one, with roots stretching all the way back to the arrival of white colonizers in Australia. Pilkington opens the book with chapters that describe the earliest years of colonialism in Australia, tracing the ways in which English settlers, hungry for land and power, brutalized, murdered, raped, and pillaged their way through the Australian bush, decimating Aboriginal populations and tearing apart tribes and families. By the 1930s, when Molly and her sisters were children, miscegenation between white Australians and Aboriginals was common enough to warrant the creation of the label "half-caste," or "muda-muda" to describe the children of Aboriginal mothers and white fathers. These children were systematically rounded up by the government under the guise of "protecting" them—when in reality the goal of the white Australian government was to assimilate and eradicate the Aboriginal population entirely. Australia's "Chief Protector of Aborigines," A.O. Neville, was quoted in 1937 as asking "[Do we want] to have a population of one million blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget there ever were any Aborigines in Australia?" The insidious mechanisms of racism, colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide are present on each page of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In addition to a memoir of her own life, and the time she spent in the Moore River internment camp, *Under the Wintamarra Tree*, Doris Pilkington is the author of *Caprice: A Stockman's* Daughter, a novel which tells the fictional story of three generations of Aboriginal women. A major contributor to the canon of Aboriginal literature, Pilkington's work joins books like *The Burnt Stick* by Anthony Hill and *My Place* by Sally Morgan in establishing a literature which seeks to examine and reclaim Aboriginal identity, culture, and history in the face of devastating violence and cruelty. *The Burnt Stick* is a picture book for children, while *My Place* is an autobiography which tracks Morgan's search for her roots in a family which has been scattered and scarred by forced assimilation.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*
- **When Written:** 1990s
- **When Published:** 1996
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction; family memoir
- **Setting:** Jigalong, Western Australia; Moore River Native Settlement, Western Australia
- **Climax:** Molly, Gracie, and Daisy escape from Moore River Native Settlement
- **Antagonist:** Colonialism
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

The Silver Screen. Adapted into a major motion picture in 2002 and retitled *Rabbit Proof Fence*, Pilkington's family history was brought before audiences around the world.

The State of the Fence. Although the rabbit-proof fence exists to this day, in the 1950s the government introduced myxomatosis (a disease that affects rabbits) to Australia in a successful attempt to devastate the continent's rabbit population. Since that time, the rabbit-proof fence has seen far less rabbit traffic than it once did.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the early 1800s, two leaders of Aboriginal tribes separately encounter white English colonists. Though the elders, Kundilla and Yellagonga, are warily optimistic at first, it becomes clear that the English have one goal and one goal only: take as much Aboriginal land as they can. As the colonizers' hold on Australia grows tighter and tighter, Aboriginal tribes all across the continent are forced to abandon their lands, their cultures, and even their languages, while the English dole out meager rations and supplies to the peoples they have decimated and remark blithely on the Aboriginals' "gratitude" for these "small things."

By the early 1900s, Western Australia is a prosperous settlement, though the original inhabitants have been marginalized and forced to adapt to the presence of white settlers. In 1907, a **rabbit-proof fence** which runs through Western Australia, designed to keep invasive rabbit populations from migrating to coastal towns from the bush in the east, has been completed, though it is not as effective as the government hoped it would be. The Mardudjara—or Mardu—Aboriginal people, who once roamed freely throughout Western Australia, have been scattered and devastated by nearly a century of violence at the hands of the white settlers. As the nomadic desert tribes of Western Australia seek a consistent food supply (their hunting grounds and arable lands having been occupied by whites), settlements like the Jigalong depot, which allow the Aboriginals to maintain a semi-nomadic lifestyle supplemented by government rations, begin to thrive as centers of Aboriginal life.

A girl named Molly—the author's mother—is born at the Jigalong settlement to an Aboriginal mother and a white father. She endures teasing from the other Aboriginal children, but as the number of half-caste, or mixed-race, children in the area begins to grow, Molly feels less alone. With the arrival of her "sisters"—her cousins Gracie and Daisy, also half-caste girls—Molly finally feels like she has true friends. While Molly, Gracie, and Daisy play and grow, local government officials watch the girls carefully. Half-caste children all around the country are being rounded up and sent away to "missions," where they are educated and assimilated far away from their native roots. In July of 1930, when Molly is fifteen, Constable Riggs—the Protector of Aborigines—arrives in Jigalong to take the girls away.

After a long and overwhelming journey south, to Perth and beyond, the girls arrive at the Moore River Native Settlement. Their accommodations feel more like a jail than a dormitory, and the girls long for home. They quickly befriend a girl named Martha Jones, who is Molly's age. Martha shows the girls the ropes and attempts to make them feel at home—or at least a little better—but Molly's mind is made up: she plans to take her sisters and escape at first opportunity. On the morning the girls are meant to start classes, Molly leads her sisters to the lavatory while their bunkmates head off to class. From there, the girls make a break for it, and so begins a nine-week, 1100-mile trek through the Australian bush. Molly plans to find the rabbit-proof fence and follow it all the way home, but their journey is not so simple. The government is hunting them, sending out search planes and trackers to try and corner the girls in the vast wilds of the outback. The girls, desperate for food and drinkable water, rely on the survival skills they learned from their tribe as often as they are forced to rely on the kindness of strangers—strangers who often report them to the authorities as soon as the girls are out of sight. Despite all these dangers and more—wild animals, inclement weather, cold winter temperatures, and infected wounds—the girls make it to the rabbit-proof fence. As they near home, Gracie hears that her mother has moved to Wiluna, and breaks off from the group in order to find her. Molly and Daisy, devastated by the separation but determined to complete the journey, carry on towards home. Seemingly against all odds, they make it back to their families. As soon as the girls arrive back in Jigalong, their parents pack up and move them out of sight of the government's watchful eyes, hoping to keep the girls safe from recapture.

In an epilogue, Doris Pilkington informs her readers that Gracie never made it to her mother—she was captured and sent back to Moore River almost immediately. Molly was eventually recaptured, as well, and her daughter—Doris (the author)—was raised in the Moore River facility herself.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Doris Pilkington – The author of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* and the daughter of Molly, the half-caste girl whose incredible journey forms the heart and soul of the narrative. Pilkington contrasts her mother's story with stories of early but equally devastating Aboriginal encounters with the white settlers who would go on to decimate Aboriginal populations and culture. Outraged by the stolen past, present, and future of her people, Pilkington composes a narrative in which themes of desperation and desolation, racism and colonialism, and the importance of family, culture, and identity combine to demonstrate the resilience of hope and the empowerment that can come with reclaiming one's identity through storytelling. An awestruck narrator of her mother's and her aunts' legendary trek through the bush, Pilkington reveres both her family's history and her culture's history, and composed this book as an ode to both. Pilkington herself was brought up in the Moore River Native Settlement, a fact which she keeps from her readers until the book's very end, and which frames the book's themes of loss and dispossession in a whole new light by showing how generations on generations of Aboriginal people have been affected by the greed and pride of the white settlers

who colonized Australia centuries ago.

Molly – Doris Pilkington's mother and the protagonist of the book, Molly is an intrepid fifteen-year-old "half-caste," or mixed-race, Aboriginal girl. When captured alongside two of her "sisters" (actually cousins) and sent to the Moore River Native Settlement, Molly devises a plan to escape the internment camp and make her way home by following the **rabbit-proof fence** through Western Australia. The 1100-mile, nine-week trek made the girls famous throughout the country, as they were relentlessly and publicly hunted by the authorities during the entirety of their journey. Molly's fearlessness, kindness, and generosity made her a perfect leader, and her knowledge of navigation and survival skills—indispensable skills that she took from her family's culture, which the government was actively trying to stamp out—ultimately enabled her to successfully return herself and her sister Daisy to the safety of their home.

Gracie – Molly's younger "sister" (the two are really cousins) and favorite playmate. Gracie is also half-caste. She and Molly are taken away together by Constable Riggs and transported to the Moore River Native Settlement in order to be educated away from their families. When the three girls escape, they embark on a nine-week trek through the Australian bush. Throughout the journey, Gracie is fearful and often complains, and towards the end of their trek, Gracie learns that her mother has moved from Jigalong from Wiluna. She decides to peel off from the group and travel alone to Wiluna. The other two girls beg her to continue on with them, but she is exhausted and desperate to get to her mother. At Wiluna, Gracie is recognized by authorities and apprehended, and soon sent back to Moore River to resume her "education."

Daisy – A younger "sister" of Molly (the two are really cousins) and another half-caste girl who, along with Molly and with Gracie, is captured by Constable Riggs and taken on a long, harrowing journey to the Moore River Native Settlement, so that the three half-caste girls can be "properly" educated away from their native families. Throughout the journey home, Daisy is stoic and cooperative, and she and Molly eventually reach home together to great welcome and fanfare.

Kundilla – The leader of a tribe of Aborigines, the Nyungar. Kundilla has heard stories of the aggression and brutality of white invaders, but when he witnesses white British soldiers treating his fellow tribesmen with respect, he assures his people that they have nothing to fear. Pilkington uses Kundilla's point of view to convey what she imagines might have been an Aboriginal man's perspective on racism and colonialism before colonizers had fully occupied Aboriginal land.

Yellagonga – The leader of a Nyungar tribe circa the 1820s, during which time the tribe is beset by white invaders as British Naval forces seeking to colonize Australia and possess the Aboriginals' land. Yellagonga is wary of the white men from the start, and as his people are slowly removed from their land, cut off from their food sources, and brutalized by their colonizers, Yellagonga knows that, sadly, there is nothing he can do. There is, as Pilkington writes, "no recourse for any injustices committed against his people." Like Kundilla, Pilkington uses the character of Yellagonga to illustrate an early Aboriginal reaction to white invaders and the devastating effects of colonization.

Captain Charles Fremantle – A captain in the British Navy who, after attempting to obtain the Aboriginals' consent to rename their land to no avail, took their silence as lack of resistance and named their lands Western Australia in the name of the British government. The Port of Fremantle, where Molly, Daisy, and Gracie stop briefly on their way to the Moore River Native Settlement, is named for him.

Captain James Stirling – The captain on a ship full of English settlers who arrived in Western Australia in the late 1820s. In his greed to possess as much Australian land as he could, Stirling did not account for the idea that others might have their eyes on the land as well. When his ship approached the mouth of the Swan River, he saw Captain Charles Fremantle's ship had already arrived. Anxious to make port as quickly as possible, Stirling ran his ship onto the rocks. Once ashore, he discovered that his rival Fremantle had gone ashore and taken formal possession of one million square miles of land already, and had named it the Swan River Colony.

Maude – Molly's mother. After being rejected by the young Aboriginal man to whom she has been betrothed since childhood, Maude takes secret pleasure in continuing to explore life on her own. She has an affair with Thomas Craig, a white man who works alongside her father as an inspector along the **rabbit-proof fence**, and later gives birth to Molly in the bush in order to protect her from the watchful eyes of the authorities.

Mr. Keeling – The Superintendent at the Jigalong station who first reports to the authorities rounding up half-caste children that Molly, Daisy, and Gracie are living outside Jigalong. Though he eventually recanted his report, and wrote to his higher-ups that there was no need to send the three girls away as they were thriving in their own communities, this letter was ignored, and the girls were forcibly removed from their homes anyway.

Constable M.J. Riggs – A government official whose title, Protector of Aborigines, is deeply ironic, as Riggs is anything but a protector. Riggs is charged with enforcing a government program in which half-caste, or mixed-race, Aboriginals are rounded up and sent to "schools" which are really internment camps meant to assimilate mixed-race children into white culture and estrange them from their native roots. One day, Riggs comes to the camp outside Jigalong to take Molly, Gracie, and Daisy away from their families and set them off on the long journey to the Moore River Native Settlement. It is Constable

Riggs, too, who recaptures Gracie after she separates from Molly and Daisy during their trek through the bush, and he continues to scout the locations of Molly and Daisy after they have already returned to their families, as well.

Martha Jones – A kind, gregarious fifteen-year-old girl who befriends Molly, Gracie, and Daisy when they arrive at the Moore River Native Settlement. She shows them the ropes and attempts to ease their fears, and takes them on a long walk which, unbeknownst to Martha, allows Molly to scope out a potential escape route.

Mrs. Flanagan – A woman who provides Molly, Gracie, and Daisy with food and warm clothes when they stop at her farmhouse during their trek through the bush. She instructs them how to get to the **rabbit-proof fence** once they tell her that following the fence home is their goal. Although she assures the girls that she will not report them to the authorities, she calls her local Superintendent as soon as they leave the house because she is worried that the girls will get lost and die out in the wilderness, and feels it is her "duty" to report them so that they can be rescued.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Thomas Craig – Molly's father. A white Australian and a repairman who works along the **rabbit-proof fence**.

Matron Campbell – A brusque woman who works at the Moore River Native Settlement. She picks Molly, Gracie, and Daisy up in Fremantle and transports them to the settlement.

Polly Martin – One of the girls at the Moore River Native Settlement. A good friend of Martha's, she warns Molly, Gracie, and Daisy of the severe punishments that any runaways from the camp face.

TERMS

Mardu Short for Mardudjara, Mardu references the people of the several Aboriginal tribes that once lived in the desert regions of Western Australia. It also refers to the common language they speak. Each tribe once spoke their own dialect; today, though, they speak a language which combines two ancient dialects. **Molly**, **Gracie**, and **Daisy** are Mardu.

Half-caste/Muda-muda "Half-caste" is the English term for people of mixed racial descent with one white parent and one Aboriginal parent. "Muda-muda" is the Mardu equivalent of this term.

Genga The spirit of an Aboriginal ancestor. When white settlers began to arrive in Australia, many Aboriginals believed them to be gengas, and therefore welcomed them with respect and reverence.

Marbu According to Pilkington's glossary, a marbu is a "sharp-toothed, flesh-eating evil spirit that has been around since the Dreamtime." The Dreamtime is the creation period in Aboriginal myth. Different Aboriginal characters in *Rabbit Proof Fence* mistake unfamiliar things for Marbus: for instance, a half-caste man, a horse, and a mysterious figure that **Molly**, **Gracie**, and **Daisy** encounter in the bush during their escape from the Moore River Settlement are all thought, at various times, to be Marbus.

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.

RACISM AND COLONIALISM

English settlers claimed Australia as a British colony in the late 1700s, marking the beginning of a long and insidious process of displacement and extermination for Australia's indigenous people, the Aborigines. In *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Doris Pilkington writes that in the early days of colonization many Aboriginal tribes believed their colonizers to be spirits (or gengas) rather than human beings, and thus underestimated or failed to understand what a grave threat colonizers posed to their land, culture, and lives. British colonizers not only killed and enslaved Aboriginal people systematically—they also systematically laid waste to Aboriginal culture, forbidding Aborigines to speak their own languages, practice their own traditional laws, and perform their tribes' sacred rituals. In examining the effects of racism and colonialism on her own family's history, Pilkington shows how the English tried repeatedly to skew their actions as beneficial to Australia's indigenous population. This attitude led to the creation of government settlements like the one described in *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, where half-castes (Aboriginal children of mixed racial descent) were held in captivity with the intention of being forcibly assimilated into white society.

In their writing, English colonizers frequently described the ways in which they deprived their "black servants" of wages and dignity, paying them "little more than rice" and assuring both themselves and one another that the Aboriginals were "grateful for small things." One newspaper article from 1861 described the annual distribution of blankets to Aboriginal people as an "insult"—an insufficient and degrading means of making "reparations." Yet the article stated that "the scanty supply of food doled out to this miserable remnant of a once numerous people is received by them with the most lively gratitude." This destructive line of thinking—that the dispossessed and bereaved Aboriginals were grateful to accept these meager

handouts in recompense for the decimation of their people—led directly to the creation of "government settlements" (in practice, internment camps) such as the Moore River Settlement, where Pilkington's mother Molly, along with her sisters Daisy and Gracie, were sent as young girls. The children of this "Stolen Generation" (as well as Pilkington's own) were constantly being surveilled by officials from the Department of Native Affairs, who saw the "ever-increasing numbers of half-caste children" in Australia as a threat to white supremacy. As a result, government officials separated as many part-Aboriginal children from their families as they could, forcing them into settlements where they would be "educated" and distanced from their Native roots.

The devastating effects of racism and colonialism are encapsulated in this vicious system. White settlers came to Australia, conquered the Aboriginals, and often raped Native women or otherwise coerced them into exploitative sexual relationships. As for the mixed-race children who resulted from these unions, the British soon contrived an elaborate bureaucracy whose sole purpose was to assimilate them into white society. A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of the Aborigines (an ironic title indeed), made his dreadful purpose even clearer; he hoped to "merge [mixed-race children] into our white community and eventually forget there ever were any Aborigines in Australia."

Pilkington writes about her mother and aunt's escape from the settlement and their return home, after which A.O. Neville wrote a letter in which he stated, "it's a pity that those youngsters have gone 'native' […] They were attractive children, and ought to have been brought in years ago." Neville's letter highlights the sinister ways in which white Australians masked the violence of their actions, hiding behind titles like "protector" and feigning benevolence and "pity" even as they express feelings of ownership of and disgust for the Aboriginals. Racist attitudes such as these perpetuated the mechanisms of Aboriginal oppression and internment until the mid-1970s, still just seven years after Aboriginals were granted equal rights in 1967.

The racism faced by Doris Pilkington's family (and virtually all other Aboriginal people) at the hands of white Australians is rooted in the colonialist practice of exploiting and eventually eradicating entire peoples and cultures under the banner of "civilization." This process is made possible by the false idea that colonizers are somehow "protecting" or "helping" the people they oppress, saving them from their "primitive" ways. By writing about the racism her family encountered under colonial rule, Pilkington situates the far-reaching effects of racism and colonialism within the history of Australia, and the much longer history of the Aboriginal people.

LOSS, DISPOSSESSION, AND RECLAMATION

The history of the indigenous population of Australia is marked by loss and dispossession. In the early chapters of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Doris Pilkington, writing imaginatively about the early days of English colonization of Australia, explores how English settlers systematically stripped Aboriginal Australians of their land, property, and culture from the moment they set foot on Australia's shores. This pattern continued unabated up to and well beyond the 1930s, when the main action of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* takes place—a time when "half-caste" (that is, mixed-race white and Aboriginal) children were forcibly removed from their families, confined to internment camps, and cut off from their native roots, deepening their loss of cultural heritage. Through Molly, Gracie, and Daisy's story of internment and escape, Pilkington demonstrates the ways in which the legacy of colonialism in Australia is one of loss and dispossession—not just of land or material goods, but of spirit, agency, and destiny. Nevertheless, she argues that even as the Aboriginal people may appear to have lost everything, there remains a fierce desire for reclamation of Aboriginal rights, independence, and the dignity of "planning [one's] own destiny."

Pilkington describes her mother and aunt's childhood, saying that "the girls were fortunate to be part of a loving family who tried to compensate for all the nasty insults and abuse" the girls suffered due to their mixed racial heritage "by spoiling and indulging them at home." Knowing that their daughters would face prejudice from both their Aboriginal friends and relatives as well as from white Australians, Pilkington's grandparents—Daisy and Molly's parents—sought to reclaim a measure of comfort, stability, and acceptance for their daughters. The story of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* is ultimately the story of Molly, Daisy, and Gracie reclaiming their own lives and narratives. After being captured by Constable Riggs (an Australian government official whose title was "Protector of Aborigines") and taken to the Moore River Settlement, the girls escaped into the Australian bush and began a thousand-mile trek home to Jigalong, using the **rabbit-proof fence** as a guidepost to light their way home. The journey took them months to complete, during which time they bravely overcame opposition from nature and from the people (Aboriginal and white Australian alike) that they encountered along the way, as well as from within their own hearts and minds as they struggled to remain determined and motivated to find their way home.

In recording her family's history in this book, Pilkington herself is also doing the work of reclamation of history in the face of loss and dispossession. Determined to tell the story of her mother's struggle and of the destructive effects of colonialism, Pilkington ultimately reclaims her family's narrative from the white colonizers who worked so determinedly to see such

stories erased and forgotten. Although loss and dispossession have no doubt shaped the history not just of her family but of her people, Pilkington's drive to relay that history—creating art out of the ashes of dispossession and disenfranchisement—demonstrates the power of storytelling to heal and redeem. Pilkington's book is an act of recovering her family's narrative, at least in part, from the devastation of loss.

The cultures and customs of the Aboriginal people vary greatly across the vast Australian mainland, and their persecution and dispossession are ongoing to this day. Therefore, Pilkington can't—and doesn't claim to—speak for all Aboriginals. She has crafted a story which uplifts the act of reclaiming one's story or one's destiny as an act of heroism. In mirroring her mother's reclamation of her own fate by reclaiming her family's narrative in the pages of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Pilkington demonstrates the importance of the work of reclamation, and the power it has to subvert the effects of loss and dispossession.

FAMILY, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY

Despite the loss, sorrow, racism, and dispossession which mark Doris Pilkington's family history, a strong and resilient sense of collective identity is ultimately what spurred Molly, Daisy, and Gracie to escape captivity and undertake the long and dangerous journey homeward. Along the way, it was the girls' culture (that is, their people's customs, traditions, and intimate relationship with the natural world) which enabled them to survive in the hostile Australian bush. As she describes the cultural foundation which shaped the lives of her mother, aunt, and cousin, Pilkington argues that even when the cultural identity of a group is threatened with erasure, a strong sense of shared identity has the power to act as a beacon of hope that can light the path "home."

The imperialist English settlers who first descended upon Australia murdered, raped, and otherwise decimated the Aboriginal populations of the continent. Once their dominance over the Aboriginals was complete—achieved through more advanced technology and weaponry—English colonizers began not only to enslave and torture the Aboriginals, but to systematically destroy their culture by forbidding them to speak their own languages, practice their own laws and rituals, and live on their own ancestral and sacred lands. This decimation of Aboriginal identity is felt deeply by Pilkington's family, who live in Jigalong—a government outpost established in the early 1900s, which attracted nomadic peoples from the desert whose traditional food supplies had been lost or destroyed by imperialism. Jigalong thus became a "sitting down place" for many Aboriginal peoples—a "base camp for holding sacred and secret ceremonies," and a permanent home for an Aboriginal group whose culture and traditions had, for centuries, been nomadic.

Molly (Pilkington's mother and the protagonist of the story) was the first half-caste child born amongst the Jigalong Aboriginals, though many mixed-race children would be born there in the years to come. As the Aboriginals who settled in Jigalong were forced to adapt their nomadic culture to new conditions, interactions between the members of the tribe and the white Australians living nearby similarly began to deviate from the established norm. As more and more-half caste children were born and then taken away, the mothers of these children grew increasingly aware and frightened of the "reeducation" that their young ones would undergo, and the ways in which this stood to weaken any meaningful sense of shared cultural identity. When fifteen-year-old Molly, her eleven-year-old sister Daisy, and their younger cousin Gracie were taken away—shortly after an official from a nearby station wrote to the Chief Protector of Aborigines that the girls were "running wild with the whites"—they were placed in an internment camp disguised as a school. Subjected to despicable, prison-like conditions and barred from speaking their native language, the girls decided to flee for home. The eldest, Molly, devised a plan to make the thousand-mile trek through the bush by following the **rabbit-proof fence**—a fence which had been constructed to keep invasive wild rabbit populations away from Western Australian civilization. As the girls traversed the bush, they relied upon their cultural education—the ones their families had given them—to survive the journey home. Trapping rabbits and other animals for food, finding hiding places, navigating the bush, and looking out for one another's safety and well-being were skills and lessons that had been instilled in the girls from their youth, and they used this knowledge to light their path home.

Though white Australians were attempting to conduct a cultural genocide on a massive scale through the creation of internment camps such as Moore River and through the removal of mixed-race children from the homes of their families, Molly, Gracie, and Daisy expressed unflagging allegiance to—and security in—their familial and cultural identities. Pilkington highlights the girls' shared and firm sense of identity, and their deft, willful use of all they learned from their culture, as instrumental in their escape from the shackles of forced assimilation. Through Molly, Gracie, and Daisy's story, Pilkington makes a case for the resilience, necessity, and beauty of familial and cultural identity.

ALTRUISM VS. CRUELTY

Throughout the pages of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Doris Pilkington examines the line between altruism and cruelty. As she reproduces missives sent between members of the Australian government, and imagines interactions between government officials and the half-caste children they were tasked with capturing, however,

this line sometimes becomes blurry. The cruelty of the Australian government's campaign to forcibly assimilate—even eradicate—Aboriginal culture is undeniable, but by disguising their actions under the cover of altruism and "protection," the government was able to surveil and control Aboriginal communities by confining them to "schools" and "settlements" that were effectively internment camps until well into the twentieth century.

In the early 1900s, the Australian government sought to placate the Aboriginal people by handing out rations, blankets, and other supplies. Government officials and civilians alike marveled at the "gratitude" with which Aboriginal people received these meager, half-hearted reparations, and wrote mournfully in letters and newspaper articles of the "dispossession" of the "once-numerous" tribes. These meager attempts at atonement, an insult to the Aboriginal people, were really designed to placate not the Aboriginals but the Australians, allowing them to feel slightly better about the destruction, violence, and chaos they had unleashed upon the continent, as well as the government's ongoing systemic subjugation of Aboriginal people. The insidiousness and cruelty of such unthinking shows of mock altruism is a major concern of Pilkington's throughout the text, and she teases this theme out, as the book progresses, through the characters she reimagines and recreates.

Doris Pilkington was herself raised at the Moore River Native Settlement, and has said in interviews that she did not realize the true nature of the place she came to see as her home—or the true role of "protectors" like A.O. Neville and Constable Riggs—until long after she'd departed the settlement. The irony of bestowing the title of "protector" upon men whose role in their local governments was to hunt down, round up, and forcibly remove half-caste children from their families is palpable throughout the text. In their letters to one another, these "protectors" discuss what to do with the children they are charged with monitoring in disdainful language. Officials abduct Molly, Gracie, and Daisy from their homes and transport them thousands of miles away without any concern for the damaging effect this forced separation will have on the girls. When a constable charged with watching Molly, Gracie, and Daisy becomes otherwise occupied, he leaves them in a jail cell for several days while they await passage south to Fremantle. The government often labeled these government officials as "protectors" of Aboriginal people, but charged them with undertaking duties and tasks which actively caused harm and trauma to them, and perpetuated the cycles of loss and dispossession which had already plagued the Aboriginal people for centuries, since the arrival of the very first white settlers.

Mrs. Flanagan, a character whom readers meet only briefly, is perhaps the character most emblematic of the sometimes deceptive boundary between altruism and cruelty. When Molly, Daisy, and Gracie, nearly halfway through their trek through the bush, approach Mrs. Flanagan's farmhouse starving and in rags, she feeds the girls, clothes them, and sends them on their way with sacks of food, sweets, and supplies for the journey ahead. While the girls are in Mrs. Flanagan's house, she assures them that she will not report them to the authorities, and she asks them questions about their journey so far and their ultimate destination. When the girls depart, Mrs. Flanagan, watching them go, decides that it's unsafe for the girls to go off into the bush alone. Out of a sense of "duty," Mrs. Flanagan calls her local superintendent and reports the girls, including information about their ultimate destination: Jigalong by way of the **rabbit-proof fence**. Mrs. Flanagan is satisfied with herself, proud of her "altruistic" decision, but unaware of the devastating effect that her phone call might have on the girls' futures. Pilkington leaves it up to the readers to decide for themselves whether Mrs. Flanagan was acting out of cruel, racist motivations, or whether she truly saw herself as an altruist concerned with the girls' safety.

In cases like Mrs. Flanagan's, altruism *is*, in effect, cruelty. Even if readers are to believe that A.O. Neville, Constable Riggs, Mrs. Flanagan, and the assorted government officials who hunt the girls through the bush were all acting out of a genuinely altruistic desire to protect the girls, Pilkington shows how even such "altruistic" actions on the part of white Australians repeatedly led to experiences of unspeakable suffering and hardship for Aboriginals.

SYMBOLS

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

THE RABBIT-PROOF FENCE

The Rabbit-Proof Fence was constructed in Western Australia in the early 1900s, and was completed in 1907. Designed to keep the invasive rabbit populations of the eastern bush from entering Western Australia, the 1100-mile-long fence ran north-to-south and served as a major marker for the semi-nomadic Aboriginal populations who lived nearby, at Jigalong Depot and other government stations. When Molly, Gracie, and Daisy escape internment at the Moore River Native Settlement, Molly's plan for returning them all home safely is to follow the rabbit-proof fence all the way north to Jigalong. The fence—constructed to keep out the quickly-multiplying and noisome rabbit populations that were introduced originally to Australia by English settlers themselves—serves as a metaphor for the cruelty and incompetence of the colonialist government, and as a symbol of its desire to keep problems which they themselves created at arm's length.

White settlers decimated Aboriginal lands and murdered and

raped Aboriginal people. They systematically prevented Aboriginal tribes from practicing their own laws, culture, and traditions, and from speaking their own native languages. The horrors of colonialism forever transformed the Australian landscape—physically as well as psychically—and created an environment in which Aboriginals, stripped of their culture, resources, and history, were often forced to assimilate or die. Just as the English created the problem of the rabbits (by bringing the invasive species from Europe in the first place) and later sought to eradicate them, they invaded Aboriginal lands, created unspeakable and unimaginable strife, and then sought to keep the Aboriginals contained in internment camps and small tracts of decimated land in the hopes of effectively erasing them altogether.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the University of Queensland Press edition of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* published in 2013.

Chapter 3 Quotes

The Nyungar people, and indeed the entire Aboriginal population, grew to realize what the arrival of the European settlers meant for them: it was the destruction of their traditional society and the dispossession of their lands.

Related Characters: Doris Pilkington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Pilkington dedicates several chapters to imagining what it must have been like for the Aboriginal tribes who first made contact with English settlers. The Nyungar people are warily optimistic at first, but soon realize that the English will stop at nothing to possess the land which belongs to the Aboriginals. As the English murder, rape, capture, and imprison the Nyungar people—and tribes all across the vast landscape of Western Australia—the Aboriginal tribes begin to understand that the settlers are not benevolent gengas, or spirits of their ancestors, but rather greedy and destructive people who are only concerned with elevating their own status and amassing wealth and land for themselves.

The white settlers were a protected species; they were safe with their own laws and had police and soldiers to enforce these rules.

Related Characters: Doris Pilkington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

The white English settlers quickly begin to manipulate circumstances to their benefit. When Aboriginals whose food supply and hunting grounds have been devastated by English encroachment attempt to steal a sheep from a group of settlers, they are beaten and then sent away to a far-off penal colony, never to be seen again. The English punish the Aboriginals for small crimes (which they are forced to commit only because of the settler's abuses) while they themselves rape, plunder, and murder. They commit atrocities with impunity as they hold themselves above the law—whatever shaky semblance of a law can be said to exist at this early point in the history of colonial Australia.

As a further insult by the white invaders, an act of goodwill in the form of an annual distribution of blankets to the Aboriginal people was established. This generally occurred on Queen Victoria's birthday. The *Illustrated Melbourne Post* of 20 August 1861, page 9, described this event as "a sorry return for millions of acres of fertile land of which we have deprived them. But they are grateful for small things, and the scanty supply of food and raiment doled out to this miserable remnant of a once numerous people is received by them with the most lively gratitude."

Related Characters: Doris Pilkington (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

After Pilkington describes the many abuses and atrocities committed against the Aboriginals, she then speaks of a "further insult" which encapsulates the broken and cruel relations between the Aboriginal people and their colonizers. As an attempt to apologize and offer a "return" for their seizure of Aboriginal lands and their torture of Aboriginal people, the settlers distribute meager rations and blankets to the individuals they have so cruelly subjugated. They then marvel at the "lively gratitude" the

Aboriginals express when receiving their admittedly "small, scanty" gifts. Whether this gratitude was actually felt by Aboriginals or merely imagined by the colonizers in order to further their own agenda, Pilkington does not say. The English are aware that they will never be able to repay the Aboriginals or repair the damage done to their homeland, but seem to want to pat themselves on the back for any gesture of kindness at all, however condescending.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Molly grew into a pretty little girl. Her mother was very proud of her and her father brought her gifts of clothing and pretty colored ribbons. [...] As she grew older, Molly often wished that she didn't have light skin so that she didn't have to play by herself. Most of the time she would sit alone, playing in the red dusty flats or in the riverbed depending where her family had set up camp. The dust-covered child stood out amongst her darker playmates. The Mardu children insulted her and said hurtful things about her. Some told her that because she was neither Mardu or wudgebulla she was like a mongrel dog. One morning, her mother told her some exciting news. Two of her aunties had babies, little girls, and they were both muda-mudas like her. Molly was very happy. Now she had two sisters.

Related Characters: Doris Pilkington (speaker), Daisy, Gracie, Maude, Molly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38-39

Explanation and Analysis

Though Molly's family dotes on her, she is still an outcast amongst her playmates. The color of her skin, and her status as a half-caste, cause her to be the butt of jokes and cruel, racist insults. When Molly's mother Maude tells her that two playmates just like her will soon be coming to camp, Molly is overjoyed. She embraces her cousins, as per her family and her culture's tradition, as her sisters, and looks forward to the chance to see herself reflected in her playmates, rather than to have the ways in which she is different from the others around her continually thrown in her face and used to taunt her.

Molly and Daisy had just finished eating when all the camp dogs began barking. All eyes turned to the cause of the commotion. A tall white man stood on the bank above them. Fear and anxiety swept over them when they realized that the fateful day they had been dreading had come at last. They always knew it would only be a matter of time before the government would track them down. When Constable Riggs, Protector of Aborigines, finally spoke his voice was full of authority and purpose.

"I've come to take Molly, Gracie, and Daisy with me to go to school at the Moore River Settlement."

The rest of the family just hung their heads refusing to face the man who was taking their daughters away from them.

Related Characters: Constable M.J. Riggs, Doris Pilkington (speaker), Daisy, Molly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43-44

Explanation and Analysis

Molly, Daisy, and Gracie's parents were all well aware of the Australian government's designs on half-caste children, and fearful of the "dreaded" day when the government would arrive to take the children away to "school." The government's desire to isolate, educate, and assimilate mixed-race children away from the influence of their families and their native cultures, traditions, and languages reflects a deeply racist and colonialist attitude—an obsession with the goal of one day wiping away any memory of Aboriginal culture or influence at all. Constable Riggs's title is, ironically, "Protector of Aborigines," and the man no doubt saw himself as a protector despite the reality of his role as a cruel government agent tasked with tearing Aboriginal children away from their families.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"You should have seen the other ones who were locked up for running away," [Martha] said. "They all got seven days punishment with just bread and water. Mr. Johnson shaved their heads bald and made them parade around the compound so that everyone could see them. They got the strap too."

Related Characters: Martha Jones (speaker), Daisy, Gracie, Molly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

When Molly, Gracie, and Daisy arrive at the Moore River Native Settlement, they are full of fear and longing for home. The girls quickly realize that the settlement is less a "school" than it is an internment camp. Their accommodations are austere and uncomfortable, and their dormitory is padlocked each night. The food is awful, and a small grey building at the center of camp serves as a makeshift jail, where children who disobey or attempt to escape are thrown into solitary confinement for days or weeks at a time. As Martha Jones, the one bright spot in the girls' experience of Moore River, explains the severe punishment that any runaways face, Molly is more invigorated than ever by the idea of running away. Seeing and understanding the depth of cruelty she is up against inspires Molly to run away sooner rather than later, and to do all she can to ensure that she and her sisters are not forced to finish growing up within the confines of Moore River.

❝ When the sons and daughters of the landed gentry and businessmen and professionals such as doctors, lawyers and politicians, were sent away to boarding schools to be educated they were likely to be given pleasant rooms that would be theirs for the duration of their schooling. Instead of a residential school, the Aboriginal children were placed in an overcrowded dormitory. The inmates, not students, slept on cyclone beds with government-issue blankets. There were no sheets or pillow slips except on special occasions when there was an inspection by prominent officials. Then they were removed as soon as the visitors left the settlement and stored away until the next visit. On the windows there were no colourful curtains, just wire screens and iron bars. It looked more like a concentration camp than a residential school for Aboriginal children.

Related Characters: Doris Pilkington (speaker), Daisy, Gracie, Molly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Doris Pilkington's description of the conditions at the Moore River Native Settlement become all the more heart-rending when readers realize, at the end of the text, that Pilkington herself was raised there from a young age. As she imagines the fear her mother must have felt during her first days at the settlement, Pilkington reckons with the generational horrors that have befallen her family and the cruelties they have been forced to endure at the hands of a government which used the pretense of "education" and "protection" in order to facilitate the systemic torture and assimilation of uncountable Aboriginal children.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Watching the three girls disappear into the open woodlands, [Mrs. Flanagan] said loudly to herself, "Those girls are too young to be wandering around in the bush. They'll perish for sure. They don't know this part of the country. And the three of them with just dresses on. It's a wonder they didn't catch cold. I'll have to report this to Mr. Neal for their own good before they get lost and die in the bush. It's my duty. When she had made her decision she went inside and lifted the earpiece of the telephone.

Related Characters: Mrs. Flanagan (speaker), Daisy, Gracie, Molly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99-100

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mrs. Flanagan—a white Australian woman who has offered Molly, Gracie, and Daisy food and shelter after they have stopped at her farmhouse during their trek through the Australian outback—proves herself to be just as susceptible to racist and falsely altruistic attitudes as the government officials to whom she reports the three runaway girls. Thinking that she is only looking out for the girls' well-being, and too self-satisfied to be able to see the larger implications of her actions, Mrs. Flanagan reports the girls to the authorities and gives away their current location as well as their ultimate destination. Although Mrs. Flanagan's intentions in helping the girls by feeding and clothing them may have been good, her decision to call the authorities ignores the truth that the "school" to which the girls will be sent is in fact an internment camp.

There was much excitement when the girls at last reached the rabbit-proof fence. The fence cut through the country from south to north. It was a typical response by the white people to a problem of their own making. Building a fence to keep the rabbits out proved to be a futile attempt by the government of the day. For the three runaways, the fence was a symbol of love, home and security.

Related Characters: Doris Pilkington (speaker), Daisy, Gracie, Molly

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Molly, Gracie, and Daisy have grown up along the rabbit-proof fence. Throughout the text, the fence is a metaphor for the cruelty, stupidity, and futility of the Australian government, which sought to eradicate invasive rabbit populations that were introduced to the Australian continent by their immediate predecessors: the English settlers. However, for the three girls at the center of the story, the fence is a symbol of home and security. Molly's father is an inspector along the fence, and it is his knowledge of it—and her exposure to that knowledge—combined with the survival skills she gleaned from her Aboriginal upbringing that allow her to make the difficult journey home. Molly has been uniquely prepared for this difficult trek. Finally encountering the fence after weeks of traveling through the bush renews and reinvigorates not just Molly, but her younger sisters as well.

"It's a pity that those youngsters have gone 'native,' but it cannot be helped. They were attractive children, and ought to have been brought in years ago. This emphasizes the necessity for Police Officers to report the presence of half-caste children in the bush. I know this is done now, but it seems to have been neglected in some districts in the past."

Related Characters: Daisy, Gracie, Molly, Constable M.J. Riggs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation is excerpted from a letter from the Chief Protector of Aborigines to Constable Riggs, and demonstrates the racist, haughty, condescending attitudes of those in power who are charged with "protecting" the Aboriginal people. The writer of this letter laments the fact that the children will now grow up "native," as the goal of each of the Protectors of Aborigines was to isolate half-caste children from their families so that they could be assimilated, and so that Aboriginal culture, language, and tradition would slowly be eradicated from the face of the Australian continent. The irony of the title of "protector" is never made more evident than in this extract which Pilkington chooses to reprint within the pages of her own book. She shows the hypocrisy and ill intent of the Australian government, and of the white "protectors" who sought to further decimate Aboriginal culture.

"Long way" sums up rather understatedly what was, without a doubt, one of the longest walks in the history of the Australian outback. While other parts of this vast country have been crossed on horses or camels, these three girls did their exploring on their bare feet. An incredible achievement in anyone's language. The vastness and the diversity of the Western Australian landscape would always be respected and appreciated by them—they trekked across it and conquered.

Related Characters: Doris Pilkington (speaker), Daisy, Gracie, Molly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129-130

Explanation and Analysis

In the concluding paragraphs of Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence, Doris Pilkington expresses awe and reverence for the courage shown by her mother and her aunts throughout their dangerous, historic trek through the outback. Pilkington notes that while others who have made the trek—no doubt full-grown adults—relied on horses or camels, her mother and her aunts were able to complete their journey barefoot. This is a testament to their extraordinary strength, boundless determination, and their survival skills and knowledge of the wilderness—all of which were drawn from their unique cultural and familial background, and their identities as Aboriginal people.

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: THE FIRST MILITARY POST

On a cool, early-summer morning, a man named Kundilla awakes before anyone else around him and breathes in the still, clean air. He surveys the sleeping forms all around him, and the abundant greenery—trees and shrubs. He is satisfied with the place he has selected for his tribe's winter camp.

By choosing to start the book long before her mother's story began, Pilkington is imploring her readers to see how important it is to understand the history of colonialism in Australia. She is also offering readers a glimpse at Aboriginal life untainted by racism, cruelty, or colonialism.

Kundilla departs camp to find some solitude—it is time for his early morning rituals. On his way back to camp, he checks the fishing traps he'd set the previous evening and marvels at the peace all around him. Dawn is his favorite time of day. Doris Pilkington interjects to write that Kundilla was unaware of the devastation and desolation which would soon ravage his peaceful tribe and way of life. Kundilla walks back into camp, tall and "dignified," with two full fish traps in his arms. He takes pride in the results of the previous day's annual scrub firing, a ritual in which family clans from far and wide gather together on their shared territory, set fire to dense underbrush, and flush out any game taking shelter there in order to gather animal pelts for use in the making of blankets and skin bags.

Pilkington continues to imagine what Kundilla's morning routine must have been like, and how his ordinary life looked, before white settlers descended upon his homeland. She shows the self-assured and "dignified" Kundilla in a state of peace, tranquility, harmony, and prosperity in order to highlight the ways in which the English settlers would ravage Aboriginal land and Aboriginal life, decimating everything the Aboriginals had built for themselves over the course of their long history.

Kundilla's two wives are Ngingana—who has already lit a fire for breakfast—and Mardina, who is feeding their youngest child. As she feeds her baby, she thinks of how her two older sons, teenagers, will soon leave camp to complete the rituals of tribal law which will turn them into men.

By giving readers insight into the thoughts of Kundilla's wives, Pilkington further demonstrates the pride and tranquility of the Nyungar tribe at this point in their history prior to the arrival of white settlers.

Kundilla's three older, married sons and their families camp nearby. The whole camp consists of about sixty people—many have travelled for days from other, more remote camps in order to enjoy the bountiful food supply in the area this time of year. Soon, Kundilla plans to move closer to the river, so that his family can enjoy plentiful seafood throughout the summer months.

Kundilla, his family, and their tribe live in harmony with the land around them. They live a nomadic lifestyle in which they roam from place to place, sustaining themselves on the bounty of the vast and varied Australian continent without depleting it.

As Kundilla readies for a trip to the coast, he checks his spears and traps to make sure they're in good shape. Suddenly, "an ominous sound" echoes through the forest, shattering the tranquil atmosphere of the camp. Kundilla's people approach him, and ask what is going on. He replies that he does not know, but that he and some men will leave camp to find out where the noise came from and what caused it. Kundilla summons the adult men of the tribe to them, and confides in them that he believes that "they" are back to take away the tribe's women. Kundilla's eldest son asks what can possibly be done to stop the invaders. The last time "white raiders" came ashore, Kundilla's brother and several members of his family were shot and killed.

In this passage, Pilkington reveals that the seemingly tranquil existence of Kundilla and his tribe has been interrupted before. Kundilla is well aware of the fearsome threat to his family and his people, and though his tribe has been prospering in the face of that fear, it is impossible to ignore any longer. The "raiders" have struck fear into the hearts of the Aboriginals, and the idea that they have returned to inflict more violence and destruction upon the Nyungar people is more than Kundilla can bear.

Kundilla seethes with anger as he thinks of how "cruel and murderous men"—American whale hunters—come ashore to kidnap Aboriginal women and keep them as "sexual slaves" on their ships. The brave warriors of Kundilla's tribe—the Nyungar—are no match for the whalers' advanced weapons, which include muskets, swords, and pistols.

Kundilla is angry and terrified as he contemplates how powerless he and his tribe are against the advanced weaponry of the invaders. Kundilla's desire to protect his family and his culture is intense, but he worries that it is also futile in the face of such unstoppable violence.

When whalers and sealers first began arriving on the coast, Kundilla and his tribesmen were friendly and welcoming, communicating through sign language with the white men and marveling at the men's sailing vessels. The Nyungar men offered to take the sealers to collect birds' eggs on a nearby island, as a show of welcome and good faith. The white men took the Aboriginals over to the island by boat and then left them there, stranded; then they returned to the mainland, where they ransacked the Nyungar camp and kidnapped six women. The whalers and sealers came to understand that the Nyungar people had welcomed them with respect and kindness because they thought the men were "gengas"—spirits of their tribe's ancestors.

Kundilla reflects on how he and his tribesmen were deeply deceived by the hunters the last time they came ashore, when his men mistook the whalers' cruelty for an act of goodwill and charity. This example is just one of many which Pilkington will use throughout the text to highlight the ways in which white settlers—and later, the Australian government—cruelly take advantage of the Aboriginal people.

The loud "boom" which had just frightened the Nyungar, Pilkington reveals, had come from a cannon salute. British soldiers, with orders to set up a military base and deter more whalers and sealers from operating, are raising the Union Jack for the very first time on the shores of Western Australia.

Pilkington ominously describes the cannon boom of the British soldiers in order to show that, though these men are not hunters or whalers, they perhaps have something even more sinister in store for the Aboriginal people.

Kundilla and his sons reach the coast, and Kundilla admits to his children that he is frightened. The men peer over the edge of a rocky ledge down to the beach, and are taken surprise by the pale men in "strange scarlet jackets." Kundilla's sons insist that these men must truly be gengas. As Kundilla watches the commotion below, he sees two Nyungar men being taken out to a larger ship on a small dinghy. Kundilla and his sons wait and watch, and are surprised and happy to see that their tribesmen are soon returned to shore unharmed. Kundilla tells his sons that the new strangers are not going to cause them any harm, and then together they all return to camp to assure their people that everything is all right.

Kundilla's fears seem to be assuaged, at least for the moment. As he watches these strange new white men acting generously toward his people, he concludes that they must be the spiritual beings his tribe has been awaiting. This is not the case, however, and Kundilla cannot possibly foresee the terrible violence and dispossession that these British colonists will perpetuate on the Australian continent.

CHAPTER 2: THE SWAN RIVER COLONY

On a cold, rainy day, two hunters spear a small doe kangaroo to the ground. One of the hunters, Bidgup, lifts the game onto his shoulders while his younger brother Meedo gathers up their spears. The two begin to head back to camp at Borloo, in the tribal land of the chief Yellagonga.

In a mirror of the opening of the first chapter, Pilkington again begins with an idyllic scene of Aboriginal life before the devastation wrought by white settlers, as if to underscore the devastating effects of colonialism on the Aboriginal people.

Back at camp, Yellagonga has called a meeting to discuss the strange men—the gengas—who have been coming to Aboriginal land "for a long, long time." Yellagonga's grandfather had told him stories of the gengas, but Yellagonga insists that "these gengas are different." He references an incident in which a man named Dayup, and several others, were asked to follow a group of white men to a nearby river. When Dayup and his fellow tribesmen met Fremantle—Captain of the "gengas" camped nearby—Fremantle led them to a river and began speaking to them in English. He said that his government—the British government—had "advised" him to meet with the tribesmen and seek their "approval" before bestowing an English name upon their country.

Just as in the first chapter, it is revealed that the Aboriginals Pilkington is writing about are not naïve to the threat of white invaders. The story Yellagonga shares is not one of bloody conquest or senseless rape and murder of his tribeswomen and men, but it is just as insidious, as it shows that the British are slowly worming their way into the tribal landscape, and even acting falsely altruistic toward the Aboriginals in order to gain their trust.

Dayup, unable to understand what Fremantle was saying, could only infer that the Captain was an "important man." Fremantle attempted to communicate through sign language, but this made a "formal discussion" impossible, and the Nyungar men were only more confused. Fremantle, eager to have the conversation be over and done with, thanked the men for their consent, and then announced that he was naming the land Western Australia. He saluted a nearby British flag, which his men had raised at their encampment.

In this passage, Fremantle and his men take advantage of the language barrier between themselves and the Nyungar. They appear to be seeking to have a "discussion" with the Nyungar to obtain their consent to rename the land, but actually the settlers are cruelly exploiting the fact that they have a practical advantage over the Nyungar, and do not need, in reality, to obtain their spoken consent at all when they can simply take whatever they want through coercion and violence.

Yellagonga, still addressing his people, tells them that just now two members of the tribe were hunting near the river when they heard the "frightened" cries of men and women, along with other strange noises. When the men climbed the sand hills to get a better look at the beach, they saw a group of "strange people" and, all along the beach, scattered and ruined belongings. Yellagonga speculates that perhaps the men and women had been shipwrecked.

Yellagonga, believing the white invaders to have been shipwrecked, mirrors Kundilla's inclination for assume the best, and to feel empathy and concern for the newly-arrived white men. Pilkington is foreshadowing that, like Kundilla and his men, Yellagonga and his tribe will be made to suffer.

Actually, Pilkington writes, these people were the first European civilian settlers. It is June of 1829, and Australia's wet winter weather is a "disappointing" introduction to their new country. As the settlers sit on the beach in their fine clothes, pelted by the rain, they watch their trunks, furniture, finery, and even a piano being ruined by the weather while their crew struggles to bring livestock ashore. One of the settlers, a businessman from London, laments that they are not in a land of "rustic paradise" as they'd been told they would be. Another man comforts his wife, assuring her that their captain, Captain Stirling, must have made a simple miscalculation.

The English settlers seem surprised by the winter weather in the middle of their "summertime"—symbolizing their ignorance of the Australian continent and their disdain for the way things are there. This attitude of derision and dislike will fuel their violence against the Aboriginal people as they ravage their land, culture, and traditions.

Pilkington describes a silent war between two captains—James Stirling and Charles Fremantle—who were both vying for the same swath of Nyungar land as they journeyed from England. Captain Stirling, arriving to find Fremantle and his men already present, panicked and ran his ship aground. None of the English settlers on his ship have drowned, but they are now stuck in a miserable and "unproductive" terrain. Moreover, Stirling will soon find that Fremantle has gone ashore and taken formal possession of one million square miles of land, naming his bounty Swan River Colony.

In this passage, Pilkington highlights the greed and competitiveness of the English settlers. They are so obsessed with amassing land for themselves that they completely discount the fact that a thriving civilization already exists on this strange continent—and that their actions could decimate and eradicate that culture.

CHAPTER 3: THE DECLINE OF ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

The settlers who arrived with Captain Stirling had their pick of Aboriginal land. The wealthiest and most influential were able to select the "best" land, and were advised to "keep up their Englishness" and maintain English traditions. As the colonists settled in, they held picnics, balls, and fox hunts. Many of those who had been on the lower rungs of English society were thrilled at finally being members of the upper echelons of their tiny new Australian society.

The English settlers' obsession with maintaining their own traditions blinds them to the ways in which they are encroaching upon Aboriginal tradition. The settlers lack empathy or concern for others, and rely upon the insidious mechanisms of colonization to prosper while they decimate the land of their new colony's indigenous population.

The Nyungar people—as well as the entire Aboriginal population—soon began to realize that the arrival of the settlers meant the "destruction of [Nyungar] society and the dispossession of their lands." The hunters Bigdup and Meedo complain to Yellagonga that they can no longer access their hunting trails, as they have been sealed off by fences. The two worry that soon their whole tribe will be driven off their land. Yellagonga has no words of encouragement for his fellow tribesmen. He too is disturbed by the destruction of the wilderness and the now-ubiquitous tents, huts, and houses rising up in the bush.

As the English continue to spread their settlements across Aboriginal lands, the Nyungar people find that their ability to provide themselves with food is impacted. The settlers have sealed off vital hunting trails and sections of the outback, threatening the Nyungar's survival.

Bigdup, Meedo, and the other hunters of the Nyungar tribe decide that because the English have settled upon their land and refused to share food with them, they will "help [them]selves." After spearing a sheep, Bigdup and Meedo are sentenced under English law and taken away to Rottnest Island Penal Colony. They are never seen again. Hundreds of others, Pilkington writes, soon follow them. While some Aboriginal people are able to escape, many Aboriginals are incarcerated unjustly for the rest of their lives.

This passage contains a motif that will be repeated throughout the novel: the tragic and senseless pattern of cruelty against the Aboriginals and their homeland perpetuated by their colonizers. The settlers deprived the Nyungar of their food source, forced them to commit "theft" of their own resources, and then punished them with life imprisonment in a senseless and vicious cycle.

While the English settlers have the full protection of the government that is slowly forming around them, the Aboriginals have no protection, and are in fact forbidden from carrying out their own traditional sacred laws. The English attempt to "pacify" the Aboriginals with gifts of food, but it is impossible to ignore that they have established two sets of laws: one for themselves, and one for the Aboriginals. The Aboriginal people are helpless against the English settler's muskets and swords, and soon they learn to "acknowledge the white man's brutal strength" and accept the cruel and unusual "white system of justice and punishment."

The English create laws which favor their own interests while simultaneously targeting the Aboriginal tribes. Aware of the cycle of violence and injustice they are creating, the English attempt to offset their cruelty, but continue systematically decimating and punishing the Aboriginal people. As the Aboriginals reckon with total destruction of the way of life they have always known, they are eventually forced to submit to their colonizers.

As the English settlers travel farther inland, they prevail against every tribe they meet. The Aboriginals, dispossessed of their land, their traditions, and their families, attempt to find secret and sacred sites where they can still perform their rituals and ceremonies. Nevertheless, and slowly but slowly, these rituals begin to fade from tribal memory and the Aboriginal seasonal calendar is eventually forgotten.

The long-term effects of colonization are beginning to be felt across the Australian continent. As the Aboriginals capitulate to the colonialist order, the violence does not stop—instead, they are further pushed out of their homes and forbidden from practicing important cultural traditions. As Aboriginal culture begins to slip away from the tribes' collective memories, the colonizers become more and more powerful.

The British Colonies begin to enslave the Aboriginals, using them as servants. One colonist wrote in his diary that the English depend upon the Aboriginals for labor, as they could "never afford to pay English servants the high wages they expect." The Aboriginals are paid only in food.

The colonialists continue to take cruel advantage of the Aboriginals, conceding that they must somehow "pay" the natives but doing so only with food, effectively enslaving them.

As a "further insult," white invaders—acknowledging the "sorry" fact that they have driven Aboriginals off their land and "deprived" them of their own culture—begin an annual distribution of blankets to the Aboriginal people. A Melbourne newspaper, in 1861, describes how "grateful" the "miserable remnant[s] of a once numerous people" are to receive only "small things and scanty supply."

The false altruism with which the settlers attempt to make reparations with the people they have slaughtered, imprisoned, and enslaved reveals how disdainful they are of the people they have colonized, and how hollow their commitment is to actually improve Aboriginal life in any way.

CHAPTER 4: FROM THE DESERTS THEY CAME

By the 1900s, Western Australia is shaping up to be a prosperous settlement, especially in terms of mining and agriculture. As the white settlements flourish, they are allowed to expand farther into the countryside, wiping out even more Aboriginal land. Soon, all arable land in the south-west, as well as the coastal areas to the north of Perth, are occupied by white settlers. The original inhabitants of this land, the Mardudjara, are completely discounted as white settlers encroach deeper and deeper into their territory.

As Western Australia thrives, the settlers' power continues to increase. Not only do they have superior weaponry and practical means to subjugate the Aboriginals, but they have now established farms and mines, giving them greater leverage to continue on their path of decimation and desecration of Aboriginal land.

Pilkington writes that several tribes compose the Mardudjara people, but all are referred to as Mardu after their common language. Most Mardu people have been trained by white station owners to work as stockpeople or domestic help, and Pilkington writes that the Mardu saw this work as "a form of kindness" done unto them by their white colonizers. Still, violence against Aboriginal people—assault, rape, and even murder—are common, and any Aboriginal retaliation is met with even further, more despicable violence, as the white men still have superior weaponry.

Although Aboriginal attitudes toward white colonizers have shifted somewhat in certain parts of Western Australia, the white settlers' abuse of Aboriginals remains rampant and systemic. The roots of colonialism grow deeper and deeper into Australia with each passing year.

Many Mardu begin to move south, away from their ancestral lands, to the Jigalong Aboriginal community. Even further into the bush, white settlers and cattle drivers reign, and continue to decimate the food supply that the migrating Mardu people need to survive on their journeys. When one man steals a young steer from a group of white cattle drivers, he is executed at gunpoint.

Even as the Mardu people seek shelter away from their homelands, the violence of colonialism and the cruelty of their oppressors make the task of finding a new homeland a difficult and dangerous one. Desperate to ensure the survival of their culture and traditions, the dispossessed Mardu risk everything in order to reclaim their identities.

The Mardu people—desert nomads used to traveling the bush—are forced to change their methods of travel as the roads become full of hostile white settlers. Some Mardus, making their way to Jigalong, encounter what they believe to be a "marbu"—a dangerous, flesh-eating spirit—but are surprised to discover it is just a man who is "neither black nor white"—he is a muda-muda, or a half-caste, born to a white man and an Aboriginal mother. The half-caste man leads the desert nomads to a nearby station, where they settle and begin learning how to prepare "white man's food." The nomads learn that they must clothe their naked bodies in the presence of white settlers, and are "baffled" by the custom.

As the nomads set out on their journey to find a place in which they can safely practice their own way of life—reclaiming their cultural identity in the process—they are confronted with the new reality of their world. Many Aboriginal people have been assimilated into white culture, and the Mardu, too, will need to learn how to do so—at least to some extent—if they wish to survive in a world now completely dominated by white men.

After two months, the group of nomads decides to move on—they plan to walk east, to the **rabbit-proof fence**, and then continue to the government outpost at Jigalong, where they know other members of their tribe have sought safety and protection now that their desert has been compromised by the white settlers.

The Mardu continue on, using the fence as a marker, having now learned about white customs and traditions but still determined to reclaim their own culture, and find a land that they can once again call their own.

As the group moves through the desert, they encounter another group of six Mardu nomads, and the two groups eat together and trade stories about the "terrible events" that have frightened Mardu people all throughout the desert—the white men using their powerful guns to decimate the food supply and torment Aboriginals. In the morning, the new group of nomads decides to head for Jigalong, too, in order to ensure their own safety.

As the Mardu who have learned more about their white colonizers' culture and customs encounter several other members of their tribe who have not, they warn them of the new precedent which rules throughout the land and the need to seek shelter in a new, hopefully safe place.

The two groups walk for several days along **the rabbit-proof fence**, all the way to Jigalong. That night the new group of Mardus are introduced to "civilization," and they too learn about white man's food and clothing. They also come to learn about the strange imported animals that the white men have brought to their land—cattle, sheep, foxes, horses, and rabbits.

Pilkington describes yet another group of Mardu people's exposure to white culture and customs. They learn about the imported species that white colonizers have brought to Australia—some of them invasive, much like the colonizers themselves.

Pilkington explains that rabbits in particular thrived and multiplied at such an alarming rate in Australia that the government, in 1907, constructed a **rabbit-proof fence**, which ran north-to-south through Western Australia, and attempted to keep the invasion of rabbits into Western Australia from the east at bay. The fence proved useless, as there were already more rabbits on the Western Australian side of the fence than on the other side.

The rabbit-proof fence will serve as a symbol throughout the text of the senseless and careless way the Australians have colonized the continent. Their culture has been invasive, has given rise to unintended consequences, and they have subsequently done all they can to eradicate anything that displeases them. Their treatment of the rabbits in some ways mirrors their dehumanizing treatment of the Aboriginals themselves.

The nomads reach Jigalong, and one of the women in the group, Minden, gives birth to a daughter named Maude. Pilkington writes that Maude grows up in a "warm, loving environment," playing with relatives in nearby camps and exploring the wilderness around her.

Pilkington introduces the character of her grandmother, Maude, as part of a new generation who will grow up never having known what it was like to live without the influence of racism and colonization.

CHAPTER 5: JIGALONG, 1907-1931

Jigalong, a government depot established in 1907, was used as a base for the maintenance men charged with attending to the **rabbit-proof fence** and keeping it clear of brush, debris, and dead animals. The Superintendent of the Jigalong Depot also carries the title of "Protector of Aborigines." All Mardu people who come in to Jigalong from the desert are given food rations, clothing, tobacco, and blankets, and so the depot slowly begins to "arouse the curiosity" of nomadic people nearby. Many are sick and tired of struggling to find food in the bush, and long for a place they can sleep at night without fear of being attacked by white men.

Pilkington frames Jigalong as a refuge of sorts from the danger that now exists all through the Australian outback in the form of white colonizers who prey upon Aboriginals. At the same time, Jigalong—safe as it seems—is in many ways directly under the influence and the watchful eyes of the Australian government. Pilkington is essentially saying that nowhere is safe anymore from the influence of colonization.

By the 1930s, Jigalong has grown steadily, and has been deemed a base camp for secret and sacred rituals and ceremonies by tribal elders. The Mardu develop a semi-nomadic lifestyle, staying on the outskirts of the depot and hunting on the weekends to supplement their government-rationed food supply.

Despite the fact that Jigalong is a government outpost, the Mardu are able to make lives for themselves that at least echo their cultural traditions and important rituals, such as hunting and eating communally.

Maude is betrothed to an older man from her tribe, but her betrothed tells the elders that he does not want to marry Maude. Maude is secretly pleased, and glad to not be married off to someone older. Maude likes her life as it is. She has been trained to work as a domestic helper for the Superintendent at the depot, Mr. Keeling, and is known in Jigalong as a bright, reliable, and intelligent girl.

Maude, who secretly delights in being passed over for traditional marriage and who thrives as a domestic worker for a government official, has shirked her ancient cultural tradition and is operating according to the new "world order" at Jigalong—in which Aboriginals and white Australians live and work in closer proximity than either would like.

One day Maude's mother notices that her daughter's light cotton shirt seems stretched tight around her belly, and realizes that her daughter is pregnant. She and her husband ask Maude who the baby's father is, and she confesses that the man is named Thomas Craig, an Englishman employed alongside Maude's father as an inspector of the **rabbit-proof fence**.

Maude has set a new precedent in this new world. She has consensually embarked upon a relationship with a white man, and will now bear their child, who will belong to both worlds—or, perhaps, to neither.

As summer turns to winter, Maude gives birth to a baby girl. The baby remains nameless until Thomas Craig returns to Jigalong after a weeklong trip out to the fence, at which point he names her Molly. When the baby is six weeks old, Maude introduces her to Mr. Keeling, the Superintendent, who writes in his diary that the first half-caste child has just been born at Jigalong station.

Molly is an anomaly within her tribe, and the first mixed-race child to be born at Jigalong. As such, from her birth she inspires curiosity and watchfulness on the part of the superintendent charged with "protecting" the Aboriginal people at Jigalong.

Molly grows up into a pretty little girl, well-loved by her family. However, as she gets older, she wishes she didn't have such light skin. She is always forced to play by herself, as her Mardu playmates insult her, tease her, and call her a "mongrel dog." One day, her mother tells her that two of her aunties have had baby girls who are muda-muda, like her, and that they will be coming to live at Jigalong. Molly anxiously looks forward to the arrival of her new "sisters."

Though Molly's family dotes upon her and showers her with affection, her playmates see her as an outcast and act cruelly towards her. The announcement that soon Molly will be joined by two girls like her represents a shift in Aboriginal culture as more and more half-caste children are being born, and Molly is no longer an oddity or a novelty at Jigalong.

Daisy and Gracie soon arrive at the station, and Gracie and Molly become "inseparable" as they grow older. They often play with Daisy, too. Mr. Keeling takes an unusual interest in the girls, noting that their playmates exclude them due to the color of their skin. He writes to the Department of Native Affairs, informing them of the girls' presence and of the fact that "the blacks consider the [half-castes]" inferior. Keeling writes that he believes the girls would be better off if they were removed from Jigalong.

Keeling's interference in the girls' development is typical of the Australian government's sense of entitlement when it comes to meddling in the affairs of Aboriginal people, and their relentless insistence that they know what is best for a people whose vibrant way of life they have effectively destroyed.

Half-caste children are being born all over Australia, and the government—believing that part-aboriginal children will be "more intelligent than their darker relations"—wants to isolate and train these children to work as domestic servants and laborers. Internment camps, or "missions," have been set up to "improve the welfare and educational needs" of half-caste children. Pilkington writes that Molly, Gracie, and Daisy were unaware of the government's designs on them, even as patrol officers travelled from station to station, routinely removing Aboriginal children from their families and transporting them to internment camps.

The government's racism is evidenced by their belief that children who are partly white are more worthy of education and "humane" treatment than Aboriginal children. The government wants to assimilate the half-caste children into Australian society (while still keeping them segregated in prison-like schools) and has created internment camps which will isolate the children from their native roots and their culture. The government transparently wishes for the eradication of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture, and believes it can achieve this goal.

As years pass, the government keeps a watchful eye on Molly, Gracie, and Daisy, while their parents attempt to shield them both from taunts and from capture by rubbing ground charcoal all over the girls' bodies to darken their skin.

The girls' parents know that the girls are under surveillance, and hope that disguising them will shield them from facing further violence, loss, dispossession, and erasure of their culture.

In July of 1930, Molly and Daisy enjoy a leisurely breakfast with their families and then decide to take their clothes to the river to wash them. When they return to camp, their families' dogs are barking and making a ruckus. A white man has entered the camp, wearing khaki clothing. Molly, Gracie, and their families realize that the "fateful day they [have] been dreading" has finally come.

As the worst fears of Molly and Daisy's families come true, the full force of the government's racist attitude, colonialist instincts, and false altruism descend upon their tribe.

Constable Riggs, Protector of Aborigines, announces that he has come to take Molly, Gracie, and Daisy off to school at the Moore River Native Settlement. The girls' families tearfully hand them over, and the Constable instructs the girls not to gather any of their belongings, as he will get them everything they need later on. Molly and Gracie go with the officer, who asks where Daisy is. Molly's stepfather informs him that Daisy is at another station nearby, but Constable Riggs insists that he has already checked in with that station and was unable to find her. Nevertheless, he hurries the girls onto his horse, and the three set out for the depot as the girls' families weep and wail.

The girls are cruelly ripped away from their families, and Constable Riggs knows that the Mardu are powerless to stop him. He also tells the girls not to bring any of their possessions—an attempt to further divorce them from their identities, and from any comforting memories of their home or their families. He makes his rabid pursuit of all the half-caste children he can get his hands on clear when he asks pressingly about Daisy's whereabouts.

At the depot, Constable Riggs leads the girls to a car. Mr. Keeling stops him, and tells him that two local Aboriginal women need to be taken to the hospital. Riggs loads all four women—Molly, Gracie, Nellie, and Mimi-Ali—into his car. Riggs stops at outpost after outpost searching for Daisy. He eventually finds her and rips her away from her family in the middle of the night.

Molly, Gracie, and the two sick women who accompany them are all treated as little more than cargo. Riggs's desperate desire to round up all the half-castes that he can contrasts with this casual approach to the girls' well-being, representing his desire for completion of his mission, but his betrayal of his role as a "protector" of any kind.

Gracie's mother informs her daughter's white father that Gracie has been taken, and asks him why he wouldn't do anything to stop her capture. He replies that there was nothing even he could do. She begs him to attempt to convince the government to give Gracie back, but he again insists that he is powerless. Gracie's mother, hurt and angry, packs up and moves away from her tribe, to Wiluna.

Even white Australians are powerless against the government and its insidious agenda of subjugating Aboriginals by imprisoning mixed-race children. Pilkington includes this scene to show the fear that even white Australians face when it comes time to stand up to the perpetrators of unthinkable violence and cruelty who are sworn to "protect" the very people they hunt like animals.

CHAPTER 6: THE JOURNEY SOUTH

Molly, Gracie, and Daisy sleep for part of the journey, and when they wake up and realize how far they have traveled they are too exhausted to even cry. The Constable does not tell the girls where, exactly, he is taking them, but the girls know they are headed to a settlement where they will attend school.

The Constable, having cruelly ripped the girls away from their families, now pushes his falsely altruistic agenda of sending them off to "school," even as he purposefully allows the girls to remain disoriented and confused.

Constable Riggs drives to a hospital and commits the two sick women, and then hands off Molly, Gracie, and Daisy to another official—Constable Melrose—for the remainder of their journey south.

The girls are no more than cargo to the various Constables who are charged with "protecting" them.

As Constable Melrose has other business to attend to, he leaves Molly, Gracie, and Daisy in a cell at a police station for three days. Yet another constable takes the girls on a train toward the sea, and when they arrive in the south, the constable puts them on a boat to Fremantle.

The girls are subjected to horrible and dehumanizing conditions, and passed from person to person with no regard for their comfort, safety, or state of mind.

The girls, never having been on a ship before, adjust to the rolling of the waves in their bunk on the lower deck. A few kind crew members attempt to gain the girls' trust over the next several days, telling them stories of faraway lands and the many cultures of the world. One crew member teaches the girls a couple of constellations, telling them that if they are ever lost in the bush, the Southern Cross will be their guide.

On the ship, the girls finally encounter a measure of kindness, as crew members attempt to give the girls knowledge and tools that will help them feel less frightened, lost, and alone.

The girls arrive in Fremantle, having had a pleasant journey south watching porpoises play in the waves and eating hearty breakfasts on board. One of the crew members who'd looked after the girls, Gwen, gives them raincoats and leads them ashore. The girls are overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of the big city. Gwen hands the girls over into the care of Matron Campbell from the East Perth Girls Home.

As soon as the boat trip is over, the girls are once again passed off to an individual who cares little for their well-being. The girls, alienated from the large city around them and feeling entirely disoriented, are barely allowed a moment to get their bearings before once again setting off in the care of a new stranger.

Molly, Gracie, and Daisy continue to take in the overwhelming atmosphere of the city on their way to the Perth Girls Home, where they meet some other girls who will join them the following morning on their journey to the settlement. The other girls brag loudly about how their parents will soon come to pick them up from school and take them home. None of the girls realize that their fate is entirely in the hands of the Department of Native Affairs. The following morning, Matron Campbell collects the girls and shepherds them all into a car. They set out for Moore River.

While Molly, Gracie, and Daisy are certainly frightened and disoriented, none of them seems to be harboring any delusions about the nature of their trip. They don't seem to believe they'll be returned to their families, or that their families will come fetch them. The girls they encounter in Perth, however, are either so full of grief that they have disconnected from reality, or have been told a harmful and deceitful lie by someone who was also in charge of their protection.

Pilkington cites two different letters which were sent through the Department of Native Affairs concerning the girls' welfare. One, from Mr. Keeling (the superintendent at Jigalong Depot) advised the Chief Protector of Aborigines that "nothing would be gained" by removing the girls from their home. Pilkington writes that someone must have read the letter, but no one responded. Another letter to Constable Riggs, from the Chief Protector of Aborigines, states that the girls have been collected by Matron Campbell and are on their way to the settlement, but that they are "very scared of the other children and require watching to prevent them from running away." The letter concludes that the girls will surely "accept the inevitable" and fall in line.

Despite Mr. Keeling's warning that the girls were thriving with their families and would not be served by being taken away to Moore River, the government removed them from their homes anyway. The government's "altruistic" agenda of "protecting and educating" Aboriginal children does not actually take into account those children's welfare. Moreover, the assumption that the children will "accept the inevitable" is an insidious one but it is perhaps not incorrect—the white colonists were able to force the Aboriginals into submission time and time again, and so it makes sense that they would assume the pattern will repeat itself unendingly and to their advantage.

CHAPTER 7: THE MOORE RIVER NATIVE SETTLEMENT, 1931

The trip out to the settlement is "laborious and stressful," as the roads are wet due to heavy rains. When the girls finally reach Moore River, it is dark. Matron Campbell goes inside and retrieves an orderly, who then takes Molly, Gracie, and Daisy from the car to a wooden building which will be their dormitory. The girls notice, as they approach, that the door to the building is covered in chains and padlocks, and that there are bars on all the windows. The girls think the building looks just like a jail.

As the girls arrive at the settlement where they have been told they will be sent to "school," they begin to realize that things are perhaps not what they seem to be. Their first clue are the locks on the doors and the bars on the windows of their "dormitory." The falsely altruistic front of a "school" quickly gives way to the cruel reality of the girls' situation—they are at an internment camp.

The girls crawl into their beds, but cannot sleep on the hard, stiff mattresses. All three girls cuddle up in one bed, sharing blankets and clutching each other for warmth. In the morning, they are awoken by a woman pulling their blankets off of them, who then repeats the same action at every bed in the entire dormitory.

Alone in a strange and unwelcoming new environment, the girls cling to one another, taking refuge in their shared background and the bond of family.

As the girls in the dormitory rouse from their beds, a friendly girl named Martha Jones introduces herself to Molly, Gracie, and Daisy and offers to be the girls' guide. She has been at the settlement for one year, and Molly estimates that she and Martha are the same age—about fifteen. Martha insists that things at Moore River are not that bad, and that the girls will get used to the place soon.

Martha is the first bright spot the girls have encountered at the settlement. She is kind, welcoming, and eager to help the girls fit in and feel less alone. Martha's genuine kindness and compassion is the first the girls have encountered since they left home.

In the dining hall, the girls eat a breakfast of "weevily" porridge and lukewarm tea. The girls eat together with the boys, and, after the meal, Martha introduces them to her cousin, a boy named Bill. Martha tells the girls to return to their dormitory while she talks with Bill, and they do. Molly whispers to Gracie and Daisy that she doesn't like it at Moore River at all, and the girls echo her fear and distrust of the place.

Though Martha attempts to make the girls feel welcome, less alone, and like things at Moore River will be all right for them, Molly, Gracie, and Daisy feel deeply lost, out of place, and dispossessed. They long for home, and for the comfort of the familiar.

After spending the rest of the morning talking and trading stories, Martha introduces the girls to her friend Polly, and the group decides to go for a walk around the settlement. Molly, Gracie, and Daisy are fascinated by the overflowing river which runs through the camp, and simultaneously miss the dry and rugged landscape of their home. As the girls continue their walk, Polly points out a big rock on the far side of the river, and warns the girls to never go there, as it's haunted by "little hairy men." Molly whispers to her sisters that they are in "marbu country," and that they can't possibly stay.

As the girls explore their new surroundings and pay even closer attention to where they've wound up, they realize that they are in very strange and frightening territory indeed. Though their fear of the marbu, or demon-spirits, can be seen as childish, for the girls it is a very real fear that is intimately connected to their culture and identity, and their instincts tell them more loudly than ever to get out of Moore River while they can.

Back in the center of camp, the girls pass a small grey building. A voice calls from inside and asks for some food and some tea. One of the girls asks Martha and Polly what the building is, and Polly explains that it's known as the "boob." Anyone enduring punishment is locked up and left alone there—sometimes for days. Martha tells the girls about a group of runaways who were locked up for a week, with nothing to eat but bread and water. Additionally, one of the orderlies shaved their heads and paraded them around the camp, lashing them with a strap. One of the girls asks whether anyone has ever run away successfully, but Martha explains that a "black tracker" working with the settlement always catches any runaways and returns them to the camp to be flogged and locked up.

As the girls realize the severity of the punishment they could be forced to endure if they run away and are caught, they begin to weigh their options a bit more carefully. Hearing about the violent punishments for runaways has the dual effect of frightening the girls of the prospect of attempting escape while convincing them even further that escape is necessary.

As the girls make their way back to their room, Pilkington interjects to describe the girls' miserable surroundings. Their dormitory is more like a concentration camp, and the children who live at the settlement are decidedly "inmates, not students." The girls have no sheets on their beds—linens are only brought out when there is an important visitor at the camp.

If hearing about the cruel and unusual punishments that "inmates" are forced to endure wasn't enough to send the girls heading for the hills, their realization that the "school" is a sham and that their living conditions will be unendingly miserable certainly is.

Back at the dormitory, Molly, Gracie, and Daisy snuggle up on one bed and talk. Overwhelmed by all they've seen that afternoon, the girls begin to gossip together in their native tongue. A girl on the other side of the dormitory warns them that their language is forbidden and tells them to forget their mother tongue and speak English.

The girls are at Moore River for the purpose of learning to assimilate into white culture, which begins with being made to leave their native language and traditions behind. This is the first example of another girl warning them that they could actually be punished for speaking their own language.

After a dinner of watery stew, the girls lie in bed while the wind blows noisily outside their window. Molly takes in her miserable surroundings and listens as an orderly locks the girls in their dormitory for the night, realizing that she and her sisters must escape from the settlement at any cost.

Pilkington demonstrates Molly's intrepid, fearless spirit in this passage, and her heroic refusal to surrender her language, culture, identity, and values despite the many dangers and threats that surround her.

CHAPTER 8: THE ESCAPE

Pilkington writes that the conditions at Moore River were so "degrading and inhumane" that anyone living there was considered to be doomed. Members of the staff from that period would later confirm how awful things really were after the camp had closed.

Even those charged with running the school were aware of how dire the circumstances there were, but they kept up the charade of altruism for as long as the settlements would remain open.

The girls' first day of school is a dark, wet, cold morning. All the girls in their dormitory are awakened at 5:30 a.m., and soon head to breakfast, then back to the dormitory again to wait for the school bell. Molly feels she is too grown up for school, and this is just one of the many reasons why she feels she must get herself and her sisters out of the settlement. After the school bell rings, Martha instructs the three girls to follow her to school. Molly tells Martha that they will catch up with her after they have emptied their toilet buckets. Martha offers to wait, but Molly insists she go ahead. As the other girls file out of the dormitory, Molly draws her sisters close to her and tells them to grab their bags—they are leaving, and going home to Jigalong.

Molly, determined not to even begin her "education" at Moore River, has devised a plan to get herself and her sisters out of the settlement. Molly knows that the only way she, Gracie, and Daisy will be able to get out is through escape—she is not foolish enough to believe that they will be allowed to go home, or that their families will come to rescue them. Though the consequences are dire, Molly knows she has to reclaim her destiny and find a way back to her family, far away from the clutches of the settlement.

Gracie and Daisy protest. They are afraid that they will never be able to make the journey home. Molly confidently assures the girls that the trip will be easy: they'll just find the **rabbit-proof fence**, and follow it all the way back to Jigalong. Gracie and Daisy, impressed by Molly's confidence, agree to leave with her. They collect their scant possessions, pick up their toilet buckets, and head for the lavatory.

Though Gracie and Daisy are wary at first, they trust so deeply in their older sister that they agree to follow her lead. The frightened girls need little convincing to leave—they are younger than Molly, and deeply homesick.

Outside, after the girls have emptied their buckets, they make a run for it, dashing down the cliffs to the river. As the girls traverse the riverbanks, they realize they will need to cross to the other side—they make several attempts to do so, but the river is deep and the current is strong. Eventually, they come upon a tree which has created a natural bridge across the river, and they traverse it, running for their lives.

Just out of the settlement, the girls encounter their first obstacle. Though the weather is stormy and the river is treacherous, the girls eventually find a natural bridge across. This first bridge symbolizes the providential relationship the girls will have with nature as they undertake their quest.

After a short rest, Molly urges her younger sisters to get up and start moving again. Wilderness is her "kin," and her sisters are safe in her capable hands. Molly memorized the direction the girls had travelled as they made their way south, and now she uses her memory of the trip along with the position of the sun, and the other orientation skills she has gained through "knowledge of bushcraft" to set herself and her sisters on the right path.

As if to cement the metaphorical point she made in the last passage, Pilkington points out the "kinship" between Molly and the natural world, and writes that it is Molly's intimate knowledge of the wilderness (and how to survive in it) that will get her, Gracie, and Daisy through the rest of their ordeal.

The girls come to a sand plain, and thickets of acacia scratch their bare legs. Happy to be on the dry heathlands of Western Australia rather than in the slush and swamp of the river, the girls investigate their new surroundings and take in the beautiful wildflowers and interesting flora all around them.

Again, Pilkington notes the girls' love of nature, and their excitement to be exploring new and intriguing parts of their vast continent.

As the girls continue north on the plains, clouds gather overhead, and they suddenly hear heavy footsteps. The girls dive into a prickly thicket, waiting for the "thing" pursuing them to pass. Once they are sure it is gone, the girls breathlessly whisper with one another, believing that they have just seen a marbu—a flesh-eating dark spirit. Pilkington writes that the only logical explanation for the phenomenon all three girls witnessed is that a "particularly large, hairy Aboriginal man running to beat the storm" crossed their path. Frightened, and truly believing they have seen a demon, the girls hurry onward.

The girls' upbringing in Aboriginal culture has instilled in them not just a love of and an intimacy with nature, but a belief in the spirit world. The frightened girls—worried that they will be pursued by a tracker or by someone from Moore River—let their imaginations run away with them, signaling their discomfort and fear in their dangerous circumstances despite all their prowess in nature.

Coming upon a group of rabbit burrows in a cluster of sand dunes, the girls decide to sleep in a burrow for the night. They dig into a deserted burrow and make a dry shelter for themselves. They nibble on some bread they nicked from breakfast, and drink water from clear pools they find in the dunes. The girls snuggle together, and though Gracie has a nightmare that a marbu is attacking her, the girls eventually sleep soundly, tired from their journey.

Gracie, the most fearful of the group, is haunted by a nightmare in which a spirit comes for her and her sisters. Again, Pilkington is using the girls' fear of the mythical marbu to illustrate their general fear of any pursuers as they realize the seriousness of their situation and the length of the journey ahead of them.

In the morning, the girls are awakened by the sounds of rabbits thumping in their nearby burrows. Gracie wants to catch a rabbit for breakfast, but Molly tells her they have no matches to light a fire and cook it. Gracie catches and kills a rabbit anyway, but is unable to find a sharp object with which to skin it. The girls drink more water and eat what's left of their now-stale crusts of bread. Gracie begs Molly to turn them around and return them to the settlement. She is afraid of dying in the wilderness, shaken by her dreams of the marbu. Molly refuses, telling Gracie that they'll be gravely punished if they return, and the three girls move on. Molly assures the other girls that they'll soon find something real to eat.

Gracie proves herself to be the most vocal of the group—not just in terms of her fears, but in terms of her desires and her ideas about how the girls should traverse the outback. Gracie's desire to turn around and go back to the settlement once again signals her fear of the dire circumstances, but Molly warns her that there are worse dangers back at the school than there are ahead of them in the bush.

The girls soon arrive at another branch of the Moore River, and cross precariously along a wire fence. After passing through an area of bushland which has been scorched by fire, the girls encounter two Mardu men on their way home from hunting. One of the men asks the girls where they are going, and Molly tells them they are headed for Jigalong. The men advise the girl to be careful of the terrain, and of a Mardu tracker who collects runaway girls from the bush. The men give the girls some food to eat, as well as a box of matches and salt.

In this first instance of the girls' reliance on the kindness of strangers, they are able to meet and connect with other Mardu in the bush. Here, the girls' identity and their connection to their culture helps them in a different way than just providing them with know-how: they are able to communicate with and draw empathy from members of their own tribe.

The girls continue onward until dusk, then decide to make camp for the night. They build a fire and cook the meat the Mardu men gave them, then sleep in the rough bush around their fire. In the morning they eat some leftovers from supper, and set out again. Though they note that the weather looks gloomy, they are grateful for rain as it will help to conceal their tracks from the tracker they heard about back at the settlement.

In this passage, Pilkington illustrates the tension between the members of the girls' tribe who want to help them—the Mardu men who offered them supplies and good luck—and the members of their tribe who want to hurt them—the "black tracker" whom the girls worry is hot on their trail, and will drag them back to Moore River to endure a grisly punishment.

By midday, the girls—especially Gracie—are desperately hungry. When they come upon another group of rabbit burrows, Molly excitedly announces that the girls are going to catch some rabbits for their lunch. They catch a few and continue walking until they again find a safe place to make camp. They cook, eat, and sleep, and in the morning, they set out once again.

With the help of the Mardu men, the girls have been able to take a large step toward self-sufficiency. They can hunt, and now they have the means to prepare the game they catch in the wilderness and sustain themselves throughout the journey.

The girls see two huge kangaroos fighting with one another, and skirt around them to avoid being drawn into the skirmish. The girls rest on a log, frightened by the harsh and unforgiving nature in which they've found themselves, when Molly suddenly jumps up and orders the girls to hide in a nearby tree. Once they're safely sheltered there, they hear a plane flying overhead—a search plane which is surely looking for them. Once the plane disappears, the girls continue onward, feeling fearful and full of despair.

The two kangaroos—familiar desert creatures made frightening now that the girls are facing them down all alone—along with the search plane overhead symbolize the threats (both natural and manmade) that surround the girls at every turn.

Around noon the girls come upon a farmhouse. Molly urges her sisters to head up to the house and ask the woman of the house for food while she waits outside. A young girl welcomes Daisy and Gracie graciously, then fetches her mother, who instantly recognizes them girls as the runaways from the Moore River settlement. The woman asks where the third girl is, and when Gracie and Daisy tell her that Molly is outside, she urges them to go and fetch her while she makes the girls something to eat. Gracie and Daisy are reluctant, but the woman promises she won't report them.

Again, Molly, Gracie, and Daisy seek out the help and kindness of strangers—this time, a white family who may or may not pose a threat to them. The lady of the house assures the girls that she is on their side, and that though she has heard of them she will not turn them into the authorities. The girls see an ally in this woman, and they let their defenses down in the presence of what they think is true altruism.

While the girls eat, the woman (who is named Mrs. Flanagan, and who had received a call from a government official hunting the girls very recently) asks the girls questions about their destination and their journey so far. When they tell her they are planning to follow the **rabbit-proof fence** back home, she tells them that they must head eastward if they want to reach the fence. She prepares the girls thick, delicious sandwiches, fruit cake, and sweet hot tea. Mrs. Flanagan fills a couple of bags with food and supplies, and offers them warm, dry clothes.

Mrs. Flanagan makes sure that the girls are well-fed and warmly dressed before sending them off. Her actions are kind and her advice is sound—she really seems to be on the girls' side, and concerned with their wellbeing. The girls are entranced by the delicious food and the comfortable clothing, and seem totally comfortable in Mrs. Flanagan's presence.

Mrs. Flanagan sees the girls off, wishing them well on their journey. As she watches them go, she decides that they are far too young to be wandering in the bush alone. Telling herself that she fears for the girls' safety, she calls the local Superintendent in order to report them, seeing it as her "duty." Mrs. Flanagan assures herself that she is doing the right thing.

As Mrs. Flanagan watches the girls leave, she attempts another form of care, but she either does not take into account or does not seem to care about the fact that the girls, if caught, will be sent back into captivity and severely punished.

The girls make a plan to follow a routine whenever they reach a farmhouse or local station. Gracie and Daisy approach the house and ask for food while Molly stays out of sight, where she can watch them in case of any trouble. After leaving Mrs. Flanagan's house, Molly has the good sense to continue in the same direction, rather than heading east, in order to confuse anyone that Mrs. Flanagan may have contacted with the girls' whereabouts.

The girls prove themselves to be more cautious than they seemed to be. They devise a careful plan for seeking help from others in the future, in order to ensure that anyone who reports them is working with inaccurate information. They did not fully trust Mrs. Flanagan, and head in a direction that will deliberately confuse anyone she informed.

The girls find a thick heath where they can make camp for the night, and enjoy the delicious supper that Mrs. Flanagan packed for them. In the morning, the skies are clear, and the girls make tea and enjoy a quiet breakfast. Unbeknownst to them, news of their escape and pleas for their capture are spreading like wildfire all across Australia.

While the girls are struggling just to keep themselves fed, they have no sense of the scale of the search currently being conducted by the government authorities who want to recapture them. Pilkington heightens the drama of the narrative by highlighting the girls' lack of awareness of the danger they are in.

The girls set out again, visiting another farmhouse and gathering more food before continuing on. That night, as the girls fall asleep, Molly is kept awake by thoughts of how far the three of them still have to travel.

Molly, the eldest, reckons with the fact that their families are still far away, and that the journey toward reclaiming their destinies will be longer than she perhaps realized.

The next morning, the girls continue on despite a painful development—the scratches on their legs from the acacia bushes have become infected and sore, so the girls are having more difficulty walking than before. As they continue their long days trekking through the bush, people whose houses they've stopped at report them to the authorities, and more careful, up-to-date descriptions of the girls spread through the newspapers and the gossip mill. As the girls continue homeward, they do not know that they are only a few days ahead of those searching for them.

The girls have reached a point in their trek at which things are steadily becoming more and more difficult, and the obstacles they face are becoming clearer. Between the voracious government authorities hunting them and the onset of physical distress, the girls struggle to keep ahead of all the challenges that threaten to drag them back to Moore River.

After another week of travel, the girls' legs have erupted in festering sores. The girls have now been on the run for a month, and they are tired, sore, and disheartened. The younger girls take turns giving each other piggy-back rides to ease their discomfort.

Even in their most painful, desperate moment, the girls look out for one another, physically carrying one another to ensure they are safe and able to carry on.

One day, around noon, Molly shrieks excitedly. Finally, the girls have come to the **rabbit-proof fence**. She recognizes it because her father, an inspector, has told her so much about it. The girls all feel a sense of relief and renewal as they begin following the fence toward Jigalong. For the three girls, Pilkington writes, the fence represents proximity to love, home, and security. Molly excitedly tells her sisters that they are almost home, despite the fact that reaching the fence is only the halfway point in their journey.

The sight of the rabbit-proof fence symbolizes that the girls' journey to this point has been a success. Molly's plan has come to fruition, and in the depths of their pain and misery, there is at last a happy end in sight. Though Molly knows there is still so much more ground to cover, she is encouraged by the sight of the fence, and tries to get her sisters feeling reinvigorated and full of hope once more, too.

Midway through the afternoon, the girls hear a man's voice calling out to them—it is an Aboriginal man riding a bike. The three girls run into the bush, but the man insists he only wants to talk to them. He offers them food, and the hungry girls crawl out of the bush to accept it. The man introduces himself as Don, a worker at a nearby station. He asks the girls where they are going, and they tell him that they are headed to Wiluna. Pilkington writes that Don would later report meeting the girls to his boss, who would then telephone a local constable.

Once again, the girls encounter someone whose intentions seem pure but whose actions will prove otherwise. The girls, having learned from the close call with Mrs. Flanagan, deliberately give the man the wrong information, knowing—or at least suspecting—that he will be yet another person who turns them in, either out of a sense of cruelty or misguided concern for their wellbeing.

The police send a tracker out to look for the girls based on the information provided by Don, but the tracker discontinues the search after only a short while as the girls became difficult to track. Knowing that they are being hunted, the wily girls double back on their own tracks in order to deceive anyone who might be hunting them.

The girls continue to stay one step ahead of their pursuers, taking careful measures to ensure that nothing interferes with their journey home to their families—and home, in a way, to themselves.

By the time September rolls around, the police effort to find the girls has been stepped up considerably. After five weeks in the bush, the girls are weary, but remain determined. They eat emu chicks, as food in the bush is growing scarcer as they draw further north, and continue to sleep under the cover of heavy brushes.

The government, frustrated by their inability to complete the seemingly simple task of tracking down three young, defenseless girls, doubles down on their efforts—not out of a desire to help the girls, but out of a desire not to be embarrassed by them.

One morning, the girls awake to the sound of horses' hooves. Molly urges her sisters to stay still and silent until the riders pass by. The girls set off, deciding to eat their breakfast on foot. Gracie tells Molly that they should go into a nearby town to seek help from a distant relative, but Molly insists that there are policemen in town and that it's safer to press on. As the girls draw nearer and nearer to home in the days that follow, policemen grow more and more desperate to close in on the girls, but are unable to close in on their tracks.

The girls' journey is reaching a crucial point. As the ramped-up search party attempts to close in on them, the girls experience seeds of discord and disagreement about how they should proceed. The frightened and frustrated Gracie longs to take a shortcut, but Molly refuses to jeopardize their progress—she knows they can make it all the way if they just press on.

When the girls come upon a local station, Gracie decides to depart from the group. She is exhausted, and a muda-muda woman at the station has told her that her mother is now living in Wiluna. Gracie plans to take a train to Wiluna in order to be with her mother. Molly and Daisy beg Gracie not to leave them, but Gracie is determined not to trudge on any farther.

Gracie, who has been desperate for safety or for a shortcut since the beginning of the girls' journey, finally finds a way home to her own mother on what she thinks will be her own terms. Though Molly and Daisy are devastated to separate from the only family they have known since all three were pulled away from home, they agree that since Gracie's mother is in Wiluna it is the best place for her to go.

Molly and Daisy stop for a rest near a riverbed and Molly, exhausted from arguing with Gracie, quickly falls asleep. While Molly sleeps, Daisy raids a nearby birds' nest to collect some baby chicks for dinner. She falls out of a tree, and as she does, she shouts. Her shout draws the attention of a man nearby, who tells Daisy that he knows who she is. He asks where Molly is, and Daisy runs off. The man staggers after her, threatening to report her, but Daisy reaches Molly before he can catch up with her and the two set out into the bush.

The two girls, now on their own, are shown faltering separately in this passage. While Molly, full of rage and grief, falls asleep unintentionally, Daisy stumbles while trying to secure the girls' next meal and exposes herself—and Molly—to a new threat. Even so, the girls are able to band together and escape, a testament to the strength of their bond and their ability to work together even without Gracie, after all.

Soon the girls reach a familiar cattle station, which excites them even as they realize that they are completely out of food. Unable to sleep on empty stomachs, the girls continue walking through the night until weariness forces them to stop and rest. In the morning, they set out again, and soon reach their aunt's camp, who greets them with both joy and sadness. Their aunt bathes and feeds them, remarking on how skinny they've grown, and then puts them to sleep on soft, comfortable beds.

Finally, the girls have arrived at a kind of home base, and are able to experience their first reprieve from the wilderness in months. Lavished with attention, affection, and care, the girls sleep soundly knowing that they have, to a certain extent at least, completed their goal and reclaimed their fates.

The girls rise slowly in the morning, grateful to not have to rush or eat on the run. They enjoy a leisurely breakfast with their family, and then announce their plans to return to Jigalong that day. An employee at the station where one of their cousins works gives the girls a camel to ride, and the girls set out—with the man and their cousin—on the final leg of their journey.

The end is in sight, and the final stretch of the girls' journey is made considerably less burdensome by the fact that they are able to travel with family, and to do so using a mode of transportation other than their scratched and sore bare feet.

The girls sleep a dreamless sleep that night, and enjoy a delicious breakfast in the morning. They grow nearer and nearer to home, and their joy increases each moment. It is October, now, and their homeland is beautiful in the light of the changing season. Within days, the girls can see the hills where their families hunt, and soon they are at their camp, where they are greeted with much fanfare.

The final part of the girls' journey is full of happiness and triumph as they consider all they have had to do to get through the wilderness. By the time the girls finally return to their families, their journey has become an enormous metaphorical statement about the human need to remain connected to family, culture, and identity in the face of racism, dispossession, and cruelty.

The next morning, Molly and Daisy's families move away from the depot, with no intention of returning until they are certain that the government has stopped looking for their daughters. The girls are frightened of being returned to the Moore River Native Settlement after such a long and arduous journey, and they are more than aware that there are many government officials who would love nothing more than to recapture them and send them back.

The girls' families waste no time in finding a way to shelter them—hopefully once and for all—from the watchful eyes and cruel clutches of the Australian government. The girls' families watched them be taken once, and are doing everything in their power to ensure that they are not dispossessed of their children once again.

The Protector of Aborigines at the Jigalong Depot writes to A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, to say that the girls have been "well and truly camouflaged" in the desert by their families and that attempting to recover them now is futile. Even when Constable Riggs reports to the Commissioner of Aboriginal Affairs to inform him that Molly has recently been sighted, the Commissioner writes that Molly has been "costly" enough and has earned the government "a lot of undesirable publicity." A.O. Neville writes that he still wants Daisy to be recaptured, "if no great expense [would] be incurred; otherwise the prestige of the Department [would] suffer."

In reprinting a series of letters sent between members of the local government, Pilkington displays the many different ways the officials saw the girls. Some saw them as costly embarrassments not worth the effort of retrieving, while others felt that it was worth trying to recapture the girls in order to save face and keep their departments from "suffering." One final time, Pilkington highlights the irony of these men's titles as protectors, when really they are predators.

Pilkington reveals that Gracie was recaptured soon after returning to Wiluna. She was unable to find her mother there, but planned to wait for her. After a few days, however, a Mardu police tracker reported her to the authorities and she was returned to the Moore River Native Settlement.

The sad fact that Gracie never made it back to her family parallels the experiences of the countless Aboriginal people who were—and are—unable to reconnect with their culture, and forbidden from even trying at every turn.

The girls' historic trek took nearly nine weeks. Pilkington writes that Molly, her mother is now in her late seventies. Pilkington is in awe of her mother, whose journey through the bush was an "incredible achievement in anyone's language."

Pilkington's reverence for her mother's spirit mirrors her reverence for the endurance of the Aboriginal people. Despite centuries of unspeakable violence and cruelty, Pilkington's mother's story ends on a note of hope for the ability to reclaim one's fate in the face of colonial rule.

CHAPTER 9: WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM? WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Pilkington reveals that her mother, Molly, worked as a domestic helper at Balfour Downs Station for many years. She married and had two daughters, Doris and Annabelle. In November of 1940, less than a decade after her escape, Molly was returned to the Moore River Native Settlement against her will. Doris and Annabelle were brought to the settlement, too, and after Molly was refused permission to return home after news of the death of a family member reached her, Molly ran away again in January of 1941, taking her baby Annabelle along with her. Months later—after taking the same route she'd followed years earlier—Molly and Annabelle arrived home, where they were able to stay. Three years later, however, Annabelle was taken by the authorities, and Molly never saw her again. Molly still lives in Jigalong, and is an active member of the community there.

In this coda to the end of her mother's story, Doris Pilkington reveals what became of her mother and her two aunts in the years after their historic trek. The recapture which Molly, Gracie, and Daisy feared so deeply would unfortunately come to pass. After her recapture, Molly's intrepid spirit won out again, and she retraced the steps of her 1931 journey a full decade later. However, despite her efforts, both of her children—Doris and Annabelle—grew up in government settlements. The intergenerational pain of forced assimilation and government-mandated internment is reflected in the true end to Molly's story.

After finishing her education at Moore River, where she was promptly returned to after being recaptured at Wiluna, Gracie left the settlement and began working as a domestic helper on several different farms. She married a young station hand and had six children. She eventually separated from her husband, and passed away in 1983 without ever having returned to Jigalong.

Gracie, unlike Molly and Daisy, never even made it back to her family. The fact that Gracie never returned to Jigalong is symbolic of the inability of most Aboriginals to ever return home—either to the land of their birth and childhood, or to the "home" of their true cultural identity, unmarred by colonialism.

After Daisy was reunited with her family, they all moved together to a town south of Jigalong. She trained and worked as a house maid, like Molly and Gracie, and married a station hand with whom she had four children. After her husband passed away, Daisy worked as a housekeeper at a mission. Daisy is still alive, and lives with her children and their families in Jigalong. Pilkington credits Daisy's "love for storytelling, vivid memory, and zest for life" with having helped her to complete *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

Daisy managed to evade recapture—the only one of her sisters to do so. Daisy's story of "success" in remaining free of the chains of internment is not the story of many Aboriginals who belong to her generation, nor is it Doris's. Pilkington highlights how lucky Daisy was, and in doing so draws a contrast between the countless numbers of Aboriginal people who were not as fortunate, and who were made to suffer in settlements like Moore River until as late as the 1970s.

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