

"I love Sybylla; she's exasperating and entertaining, awful and wonderful – all at the same time!" Gillian, 10

This was my life, my career, my brilliant career!

Sybylla Melvyn yearns for a life in the arts. She loves music and is determined to write a book. But as the daughter of a poor dairy farmer, she despairs of ever realising her ambitions.

Then comes the opportunity for Sybylla to go and live with wealthy relatives. In her new home she tastes a life of culture and refinement. She also meets handsome, rich Harold Beecham, who offers her a future most young women would dream of. But Sybylla is torn between a comfortable married life and the career she craves.

Will Harold win her over? How will Sybylla live with the choice she makes?



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MY BRILLIANT CAREER Miles Franklin



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Retold by James Bean and Gillian Flaherty
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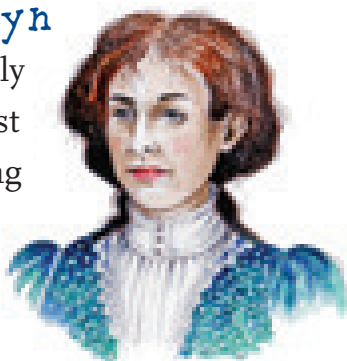
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THE CHARACTERS

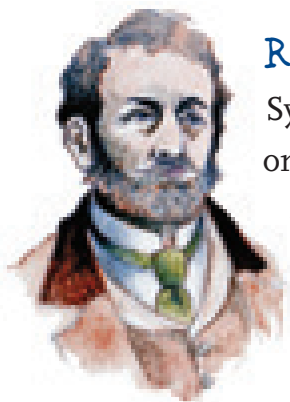
Sybylla Melvyn

Sybylla is headstrong and fiercely independent, and rebels against what is expected of her as a young woman. Will she be able to resist the attentions of the handsome and wealthy Harold Beecham?



Richard Melvyn

Sybylla's farmer father has fallen on hard times. As he succumbs to alcoholism, he struggles to hold on to his property. Will he find a way to turn his family's fortunes around?



Lucy Bossier Melvyn

Born into privilege, Sybylla's mother finds herself in a hopeless marriage and living in grinding poverty. How will she ensure that her family survives these desperate times?



Grandmother Bossier

With her warmth and refinement, Sybylla's grandma provides a haven in which her granddaughter blossoms, but will she be able to change her protégé's views on marriage?



Aunt Helen

Despite being Sybylla's confidante, Helen struggles to understand her niece's wild ways. Can she save Sybylla from herself?



Harold Beecham

Handsome, rich, and in love with Sybylla, Harold offers her a future most young women can only dream of. Can he win the girl of *his* dreams?



Mr and Mrs M'Swat

Well-off but living in filth, the M'Swats take Sybylla on as governess for their unruly children. How will Sybylla survive this intolerable situation?





MY BRILLIANT CAREER

Just a few lines to begin, to tell you that this story is all about me. I make no apologies for that: it is my autobiography. It is not a romance, and you won't read descriptions of beautiful sunsets. For hard-working people like me, there's nothing to see in a sunset except a sign of whether or not it will rain tomorrow.

My name is Sybylla Melvyn, and I was born in New South Wales, Australia. My father, Richard Melvyn, was a cattle farmer with two hundred thousand acres of land at a place called Bruggabrong. My mother came from a well-to-do family, the Bossiers, of nearby Caddagat. I was the eldest of eight children.

My earliest memories are of times spent with my father. I loved riding out with him and helping him work on the property. A good-natured man, he was renowned for his hospitality. Our home was often full of visitors – mostly men who were passing through the district for work or on business.

From an early age I could hold conversations with people from all walks of life. I was fearless, and treated everyone equally. I'm the same today: I'll show as much respect to a sheep-shearer as to the Prince of Wales.

I often rode my horse with the cattle-musterers who worked on our property. Mother shook her head and called me a tomboy, but Father said, 'Let her alone, Lucy. She'll learn soon enough what a girl should and shouldn't do.'

I climbed trees, played with the dogs, and swam in the mountain stream that ran nearby. Amid these happy scenes, along with visits to my grandmother in her fine house at Caddagat, I spent the first years of my childhood.



When I was nine, life changed completely. Father decided that his talents were wasted in out-of-the-way Bruggabrong, and that he could make a better living elsewhere. So we moved to a small farm at Possum Gully, near the city of Goulburn.



My first impression of our new home was disappointing. Possum Gully was a flat, dry-looking place. Our neighbours were struggling dairy farmers, but Father had grander plans. He was going to be a dealer in livestock, buying and selling cattle and sheep.

Soon after we settled in, Father started up his business and he was often away at cattle sales in Goulburn or travelling further afield to inspect cows or sheep. Left at home, the rest of the family soon found life in Possum Gully stagnant and dreary. Our new neighbours were friendly enough, but Mother found their company boring. They only wanted to talk about cows.



- Whilst at the M'Swat's, Sybylla receives a letter from her brother Horace asking her to stop writing complaining letters to their mother about life at the M'Swat's. He claims it only makes their mother more determined to leave Sybylla where she is. As a result, Sybylla stops writing to her mother at all.

Back in time

The story takes place in the final decade of the nineteenth century, when New South Wales was a British colony. For nearly a hundred years, settlers – mainly British and Irish – had been moving into the interior of Australia, clearing land for sheep, cattle and wheat farming. For those who took up the best land early, known as 'squatters', there was a great deal of wealth to be made. Some families – like the Beechams and the Bossiers in *My Brilliant Career* – were able to build up considerable fortunes. For many others, though, it was difficult to make a living in the harsh Australian bush.

The main role of women in families such as the Beechams and Bossiers was running the home and raising and educating the children. Women of lower

status worked hard on farms or in paid employment. While their contribution to the settlement of Australia was significant, women certainly did not enjoy equal status with men.

Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin was born in 1879 in southern New South Wales, near where Australia's capital city Canberra now stands. Her father was a farmer who, like Sybylla's father, decided to try his hand at cattle trading but in doing so brought financial hardship to his family. Stella was an imaginative, creative and ambitious girl, and wrote *My Brilliant Career* while still a teenager. When she put her name to the finished manuscript, she shortened it to Miles Franklin, a name which gave no clue as to her gender. This decision perhaps indicates her understanding of Australian society's attitude to women at that time.

The manuscript was initially rejected by publishers, but Franklin sent it to the famous Australian author Henry Lawson. He was impressed, describing the story as 'true to Australia – the truest I have ever read.' With his support, the manuscript was submitted to the British publishers Blackwood