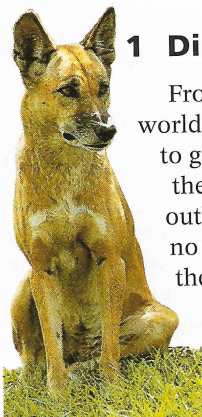


< FURTHER READING >



1 Dingo



From all the dogs roaming the world, unwanted, unloved, I had to give my affection to a dingo, the wild dog of the Australian outback. As a pup she showed no sign of the killer instinct of the dingo, the reason they are hated, hunted, trapped and poisoned on the big cattle and sheep stations. Call a man a dingo down under and he'll feel wounded for life; it's the most terrible insult.

Riding in the Georgina country, I came upon this pup. Mine was a lonely job but a good one, that is if you enjoy the wide open spaces of outback Australia, which I did. I got to know and love every tree: the Coolibar, Gum, Box. Flowers would not survive the heat, but birds, budgerigars, parrots, gave colour and life as they flew around or rested on the trees.

Happily I rode the paddocks, repairing broken fences; reporting to the station manager movement of cattle; herding small mobs back to the paddock if they had strayed. I carried my tucker in the saddle bag, bread, meat, tea, and at noon, after a hard morning's riding, boiled my pot over a bushman's fire.

My home was a hut, ten miles from the station. I rode out six days a week, happy in the freedom of my life, the blue skies, the peacefulness.

I'd sat down to enjoy my break when I saw this pup. There was movement among some bushes, and a small bundle of fur came through the bush. Apart from birds and cattle, animal life in that vast countryside was rare. I called her to me and after a while she came and let me stroke her. I fed her cooled tea, which seemed to go down well. 'You're lucky,' I told her, 'you wouldn't have survived long in this heat.'

So Lucky she became. I put her on my saddle, and rode for home. I became the loving slave of my Lucky, and watched her

grow. She was all a cattle dog should be, which was strange, but that's the way it goes sometimes. She was always by my side when I rode out. I fed her the best, plenty of meat and big bones. She repaid me with her love; my shadow by day, sleeping beside me at night.

She was only ten months old when the boss drove over early one morning to my hut. Lucky growled as he stood in the doorway.

We talked for a few minutes about the work in hand, and then 'Get those cleanskins in Adelaide paddock,' he told me, 'and drown that bloody dingo.' Aussies are like that, especially in the great outback. Station life is hard, serious, there's no time for playing about. If the boss gives an order it is carried out at once.

I should have known my dingo pup would never be tolerated on that cattle station; now I had to face the results of my foolishness.

Of course I couldn't do it; I could no more hurt her, drown her, shoot her, than jump off Sydney Bridge. She was everything to me. The boss, I told myself, was being very unreasonable. I climbed slowly into the saddle and rode for Adelaide paddock. Lucky ran beside me, coming to me when I whistled.

I found the cleanskins in Adelaide paddock; I approached them slowly, Lucky beside me; one false move and they'd be gone with the wind. I was excited; in that vast country you were not always lucky enough to come upon them. As I approached, they moved on. I had them now; riding, I moved them towards home. I looked for Lucky, couldn't see her. She was still a pup, it had been a long hard day, I was expecting too much from her. My work must come first.

But my eyes searched the far paddocks as I rode; I looked for movement, any sign of my pup. The paddock had no bush or tree to hide her from me. My Lucky never returned. Sadly I rode the trail to my lonely hut.

Life went on; station work is hard. My days were busy; but the hours to bedtime were long. I missed her all the time.



Life on an outback station

pup	a young dog
paddock	a piece of land where cattle or sheep are kept
tucker	Australian for 'food'
cleanskin	a young bull or cow
milker	a cow that produces milk

I was out looking for the station milkers, a small mob of Jerseys and Friesians. They'd gone through the home paddock fences, heading for that vast wilderness of far west Australia. I found them, and at the sight of me they turned and headed for home. I was moving them along when I noticed the yellow shadows behind the stragglers; a pack of dingoes who looked thin and hungry.

At a distance they circled now; this was something I'd never experienced before, although I knew the savagery of those wild dogs when hungry. They were waiting for the right moment to attack.

And then I saw my Lucky. Thinner, full grown, she ran with the mob! So she'd gone to the pack! I whistled, the old whistle she'd known so well, telling her to come to me. I fell from my saddle, holding her as she jumped

into my arms, licking my face.

It was my job to protect the milkers, to get them safely home. And yet I believe, in that great moment of joy at finding my pet again, I would have left the cows for the love of that dog.

Then a group of riders galloped towards me. They were my mates from the station; now, seeing the danger, they were riding to help me.

Scared by the horses, the dingoes raced away, following their leader. I looked for Lucky, whistled as I saw her running to join the pack. Soon she was up with the leader, heading for the never-never land of far west Australia.

(F. Bennett – abridged and slightly adapted)

1 Reacting to the story

- Did you *enjoy* reading the story? Try to give reasons for your opinion.
- Look at the *setting*. Find details that give a picture of the Australian outback.
- Look for words and phrases in the text that show the narrator's *feelings*. What do these feelings tell you about him?
- Find the moments of *decision* in the story. Explain who makes the decisions, why, and what the decisions show about their characters.

2 Reading between the lines

- 'I became the loving slave of my Lucky' (l. 45). Why does the narrator use the word *slave* here?
- 'She was all a cattle dog should be' (l. 47). Imagine the kind of work Lucky does.
- 'Lucky growled' (l. 55). Why?