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(PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK)

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PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

A Full-Length Play
For Eight Men and Eighteen Women

CHARACTERS

MIRANDA senior boarder, aged 18
IRMA LEOPOLD senior boarder, aged 17
MARION QUADE senior boarder, aged 17
ROSAMUND boarder, aged 16
Mlle. DIANNE DE POITIERS French and Dancing
mistress, aged 21
MISS GRETA McCRAW. Mathematic mistress, in her late 40's
EDITH HORTON college dunce, aged 14
BLANCHE boarder, aged 16
KATIE boarder, aged 16
MICHELLE boarder, from New Zealand, aged 15
FLORA boarder, from New Zealand, MICHELLE's sister,
aged 14
MRS. APPELYARD Headmistress of Appleyard College,
in her late 50's
MR. BEN HUSSEY of Hussey's Livery Stables, Woodend,
in his early 50's
THE HONORABLE MICHAEL FITZHUBERT in his late
teens, from England
ALBERT CRUNDALL coachman at Lake View,
in his early 20's
SARA WAYBOURNE youngest boarder, aged 13
MINNIE domestic staff, in her late 20's
MISS DORA LUMLEY Junior Mistress, in her early 20's
IRISH TOM handyman at the college, in his early 30's
COOK domestic staff, in her late 40's
CONSTABLE BUMPHER head of police, in his late 50's
DOCTOR McKENZIE family doctor from Woodend,
in his early 50's

CHARACTERS (cont'd.)

COLONEL and MRS. FITZHUBERT summer relations at
Lake View, Upper Macedon, uncle and aunt to **MICHAEL**,
in their late 50's
REG LUMLEY a clerk, brother of **DORA**, in his early 30's
MRS. BUMPER pleasant wife of the Constable,
in her late 50's

TIME: 1900

PLACE: Australia

ACT ONE

(SET NOTE: Because the play takes place in several different locales, both interior and exterior, most changes should be done with a minimum of effort, focusing on key pieces of furniture or set pieces to identify locations, in conjunction with sound and lighting effects.)

SCENE: *Outside L, bare stage with benches. There is a bench for the girls L. A few more benches are placed DC. This is the verandah at the front of Appleyard College. Several girls assemble, in preparation for the day's outing. Wearing a white muslin dress, with matching shoes, MIRANDA, quite beautiful, stands and reties a brown sash around her waist. IRMA and MARION, also dressed in white muslin, sit on a bench together, admiring the stack of valentines on a nearby table. ROSAMUND scampers in, dressed in white muslin, as MIRANDA looks at her sash. IRMA and MARION howl with laughter after reading the first valentine on the top of the pile.*

MARION *(reads mockingly).* "I Adore Thee Ever. Happy Valentine's Day, 1900. Your faithful brother, Reg." *(ROSAMUND crosses to read the valentine over Marion's shoulder. She starts laughing, too.)*

MIRANDA *(smiling).* He is fond of her. I saw them kissing good-bye at the hall door.

IRMA *(laughing).* But Miranda, Reg Lumley is such a dreary creature. But then, so is his sister, the Junior Mistress. *(IRMA, wearing the school straw hat, shakes her head slightly.)* Marion, can you fix this? It won't stay on. *(MARION puts down the stack of valentines and helps straighten Irma's hat. ROSAMUND continues looking at the stack of cards. MIRANDA crosses and looks out.)*

MIRANDA. What a wonderful day! I can hardly wait to get into the country!

MARION (*fixing Irma's hat*). Listen to her, girls. Anyone would think that Appleyard College was in the Melbourne slums.

MIRANDA. Forest, with ferns and birds... like we have at home.

MARION. And spiders. I only wish someone had sent me a map of the Hanging Rock for a valentine. I could have taken it to the picnic. (*Finishes with Irma's hat.*)

IRMA (*rising*). Who wants to look at maps on a picnic?

MARION. I do. I always like to know exactly where I am.

ROSAMUND (*in a formal voice*). And is it also true, Miss Quade, that you mastered long division in the cradle seventeen years ago?

MARION. Oh, stop it, Rosamund.

ROSAMUND (*giggling*). Did you hear? Somebody had the nerve to send Miss McCraw a card on squared paper, covered with little sums?

IRMA. Miss McCraw's probably checking the figures and giving it a grade.

(MADEMOISELLE DIANNE DE POITIERS enters. Originally from France, she wears a simple muslin dress, with a wide ribbon belt and a shady straw hat.)

DIANNE (*calling to girls off-stage*). Dépêchez-vous, mes enfants, dépêchez-vous. (*To IRMA.*) Tais-toi, Irma. Miss McCraw vient d'arriver!

(MISS GRETA McCRAW enters. Hers is a tall, willowy figure, with flaking skin and coarse, greying hair perched like an untidy bird's nest on top of her head. Originally from Scotland, she wears a church-going toque, black-laced boots, puce-colored pelisse and a pair of shabby puce kid gloves. EDITH HORTON enters behind MISS McCRAW. EDITH sports large, rather vulgar blue ribbons in her hair, in addition to her muslin dress. EDITH stands staring up into the sky, at the first floor of the college. BLANCHE enters carrying a hat, and stands next to ROSAMUND.)

BLANCHE. I'm surprised at her letting Edith go out in those larky blue ribbons. Whatever is Edith looking at over there?

(MIRANDA turns and looks up. She smiles and waves sadly. KATIE, another boarder, and FLORA and MICHELLE, sisters from New Zealand, enter, joining the chatting throng of girls gathered L.)

IRMA. It's not fair. After all, the child is only thirteen. I never thought Mrs. A. would be so mean.

MIRANDA. Poor little Sara. She wanted so much to go to the picnic.

MARION. She'll especially miss you.

MIRANDA. I told her that she had to learn to love someone other than me... that I wouldn't be here much longer.

IRMA. All because she couldn't recite the silly poem.

(MRS. APLEYARD enters, a large figure, billowing in grey silk taffeta. On her full bosom, she wears a cameo portrait of a gentleman in side whiskers. Upon seeing her, ALL GIRLS stop talking. They stand up straight, and fall into two semi-circles, across the stage, for Mrs. Appleyard's inspection. DIANNE and MISS McCRAW stand to the side of the line.)

MRS. APLEYARD. Good morning, girls.

GIRLS *(in a chorus)*. Good morning, Mrs. Appleyard.

MRS. APLEYARD. Are we all present, Mademoiselle?

(DIANNE smiles and nods.) Good. Well, young ladies, we are indeed fortunate in the weather for our picnic to Hanging Rock. I have instructed Mademoiselle that as the day is likely to be warm, you may remove your gloves after the drag has passed through Woodend. You will partake of luncheon at the picnic grounds near the Rock. Once again, let me remind you that the Rock itself is extremely dangerous and you are therefore forbidden to engage in any tomboy foolishness in the matter of exploration.

(IRMA pokes MARION, causing MIRANDA to smile. MRS. APLEYARD notes this movement and all three GIRLS im-

mediately reclaim stern expressions. MR. HUSSEY enters, crosses silently to the benches, DC. MRS. APLEYARD walks the lines of GIRLS, surveying.)

MRS. APLEYARD. As I was saying, the Rock is somewhat of a geologic marvel, and therefore you will be required to write a brief essay on Monday morning about it. I also wish to remind you that the vicinity is renowned for its venomous snakes and poisonous ants of various species. *(She stops walking.)* I think that is all. Have a pleasant day and try to behave yourselves in a manner to bring credit to the college. I shall expect you back, Miss McCraw and Mademoiselle, at about eight o'clock for a light supper. You may go. *(The GIRLS excitedly cross to the benches DC while MRS. APLEYARD turns to watch, stroking her cameo as they go. Then she looks up at the first floor and frowns. MRS. APLEYARD exits. MR. HUSSEY readies his large "carriage," the benches, DC. The "carriage" consists of a number of benches, and a canvas top that MR. HUSSEY pulls out from under the benches to put over the top, giving it an open feel. He stands at the side of the carriage, helping each girl or woman on. First KATIE, FLORA, MICHELLE, then BLANCHE, ROSAMUND and EDITH, MISS McCRAW and DIANNE, then IRMA, MARION and MIRANDA. MR. HUSSEY takes his place at the front and takes hold of imaginary reins. All passengers settle into their places. MISS McCRAW smooths down her dress, which has been ruffled due to the girls and the boxes of food and drink also in the carriage.)*

MISS McCRAW. Thank you, Mr. Hussey. You may go. *(As the "ride" starts, all PASSENGERS move slightly to give the sense of movement and, as the ride progresses, they watch the scenery through the sides of the carriage. Some PASSENGERS climb over others when speaking, unthinkingly. EDITH, especially, moves over the other riders throughout the trip. Sounds of horses and wheels moving across the road can be heard.)*

IRMA. I want to tell you both about my dream last night.

MARION. You want to talk about dreams when we're out here in the wild?

EDITH *(pointing)*. I see Mount Macedon!

DIANNE. It's not nice to point, Edith.

IRMA. In my dream...

MARION (*holding finger for IRMA to see*). Is this a wart?

IRMA. No, silly. It's a callous you got, maybe from needlework...

KATIE (*from the back*). A spider! (*All GIRLS turn to look at them.*)

MICHELLE. Kill it, quick. (*A smashing noise is heard.*)

MIRANDA. Mr. Hussey, did you know today is Saint Valentine's Day?

MR. HUSSEY. Well, Miranda, I can't say I did. Don't know much about saints. What's this one's particular job?

IRMA. Mam'selle says he's the Patron Saint of Lovers. He's a darling, sends people gorgeous cards with tinsel and real lace. Have a caramel? (*She pulls a piece of candy out of a box and offers it to Mr. Hussey.*)

MR. HUSSEY. Not while I'm driving, thanks all the same. Say, Irma, I went to the races last Saturday and saw your father's horse come in first place.

IRMA. Oh, really? What was its name and how far did it go?

EDITH (*butting in, letting her ribbons drape over Irma's shoulders*). Why'd you name this horse Duchess?

MR. HUSSEY (*perturbed*). Comes to that, Miss, why are you called Edith?

EDITH (*primly*). Because Edith is my grandmother's name, only horses don't have grandmothers like we do.

MR. HUSSEY. Oh, don't they just? (*MISS McCRAW wipes perspiration away from her face and neck.*)

MISS McCRAW. And we do this for pleasure, so that we may shortly be at the mercy of venomous snakes and poisonous ants... How foolish can human creatures be!

EDITH. I'm miserable. Can't we have some lemonade now?

FLORA. Me, too.

DIANNE. All right. (*She taps Mr. Hussey on the shoulder.*) It is très chaud. (*MR. HUSSEY pulls up the reins and stops the carriage. The GIRLS stretch out their legs without leaving the carriage.*) Lemonade break! (*Some of the GIRLS start to wave their dresses up and down, in a fanning motion, indicating great discomfort caused by heat. DIANNE pulls out a wicker basket, hands out cups and pours. MR. HUSSEY even takes a cup.*)

IRMA. Can we take our hats off, too, Mam'selle?

MISS McCRAW. Certainly not. Because we are on an excursion, there is no necessity to look like a wagon load of gypsies. *(A few of the GIRLS remove their hats anyway. A box of biscuits is passed around. In hot silence, the GIRLS, DIANNE, MISS McCRAW and MR. HUSSEY eat and drink. The silence lasts several seconds. MIRANDA looks around the group.)*

MR. HUSSEY. It's been a long time since I tasted this stuff. I don't take any hard liquor, though, when I've got a big day on my hands like this. *(MIRANDA stands, raising her mug of lemonade above her head.)*

MIRANDA. To Saint Valentine! *(Everyone raises a cup, including MR. HUSSEY.)*

ALL. Saint Valentine!

MR. HUSSEY. And now, if your saint has no objections, Miss Miranda, I think we'd better be on our way. I swore black and blue to your boss I'd have you back at the college by eight o'clock. *(KATIE moves the blanket and basket back to the carriage.)*

DIANNE. Allons-y, mes enfants.

MISS McCRAW. Humans are obsessed with the notion of perfectly useless movement. Nobody but an idiot ever seems to want to sit still for a change. *(DIANNE starts to count the girls.)*

DIANNE. Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six... *(Includes MISS McCRAW.)* ...dix ...All right, Mr. Hussey. *(The journey starts anew, with the beginning jolt of the carriage rocking the GIRLS.)*

EDITH. I can't wait for Cook's fabulous chicken pie.

MISS McCRAW. There is no reason why we should be late tonight, even if we linger for an extra hour at the Rock. Mr. Hussey knows as well as I do that two sides of a triangle are together greater than the third. This morning we have driven along two sides of a triangle... Am I correct, Mr. Hussey? *(MR. HUSSEY nods.)* Very well, then... You have only to change your route this afternoon and return by the third side. In this case, since we entered this road at Woodend at right angles, the return journey will be along the hypotenuse.

MR. HUSSEY (*frowning*). I don't know about a hippopotamus, ma'am, but if you're thinking of the Camel's Hump, it's a blooming sight longer road than the one we came by. (*He points with the reins to scenery at R.*) You might be interested to know there isn't even a made road — only a sort of rough track over the back of the Mount.

MISS McCRAW. I was not referring to the Camel's Hump, Mr. Hussey. Thank you for your explanation all the same. Knowing little of horses and roads, I tend to become theoretical. Marion, can you hear me up there in front? You understand what I mean, I hope.

MARION (*nodding*). Yes, Miss McCraw.

BLANCHE. Look, there it is! (*She stands up in the carriage, looking out L.*)

ROSAMUND. Hanging Rock! (*All GIRLS turn to regard the monolith.*)

MARION. Fantastic!

MR. HUSSEY (*excited*). There she is, ladies, only about a mile and a half to go! Over five hundred feet in height... volcanic... several monoliths... thousands of years old... Pardon me, Miss McCraw, I should say millions.

MISS McCRAW. The mountain comes to Mohammed. The Hanging Rock comes to Mr. Hussey. (*DIANNE smiles at Mr. Hussey.*)

MR. HUSSEY. Well, I reckon you ladies will be wanting your lunches. I know I'll be ready for that chicken pie I've been hearing so much about.

EDITH. My favorite.

IRMA (*craning her head*). Let me see this Rock.

MIRANDA (*excited*). Look, up near the top, two boulders, balancing...

MARION. I see...

MIRANDA. Wouldn't it be wonderful to...

MR. HUSSEY. We're here. Could someone do the honors of opening the gate?

MIRANDA. I will. (*She jumps off the carriage and runs off L. A loud, horrible screeching sound is heard as she disappears. MR. HUSSEY, startled, grabs in the reins.*)

MR. HUSSEY. Come up, Sailor... Duchess, get over, you...
Cripes, Miss Miranda, you'd think they'd never set eyes on a
blooming parrot before!

(MIRANDA enters, wide-eyed.)

MIRANDA. Follow me! *(Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE TWO

SCENE: *On the picnic grounds, a few hours later. The picnic spread is DC. Jagged rock formations can be seen UC. There is a platform UC, underneath the formations, elevating this rocky area. Due to the heat, most of the girls have loosened their clothing, to be more comfortable. Bird and insect noises can be heard throughout the scene. The picnic spread consists of two large white tablecloths, underneath the shadow of a tree. Chicken pie, angel cake, jellies, bananas, and tea (or various similar props) are spread on the cloths. MIRANDA, IRMA and MARION lie on their stomachs, lazily looking around. DIANNE is asleep, on the edge of a tablecloth. EDITH helps herself to tea, spilling some of the cream. BLANCHE snores lightly. ROSAMUND does needlework. MISS McCRAW reads. MICHELLE and FLORA are each sketching MISS McCRAW, on large pads. KATIE reads. MR. HUSSEY smokes a pipe, and stares off in the distance.*

EDITH. How dreadfully quiet it is here. How anyone can prefer to live in the country I can't imagine. Unless, of course, they are dreadfully poor.

MARION. If everyone else in Australia felt like that, you wouldn't be making yourself fat on rich cream.

EDITH *(pointing R)*. Except for those people over there with the wagonette, we might be the only living creatures in the whole world. *(Looking down.)* There's a whole army of ants marching by. Watch out, Marion. Oops, they're headed for Blanche. *(MARION flicks the ants away.)*

MIRANDA (*on her back*). Look, there are shapes in the clouds.
(IRMA picks up a penknife and starts to peel an apricot. MR. HUSSEY rises.)

IRMA. Why is it, Miranda, that such a sweet, pretty creature is a schoolteacher - of all dreary things in the world... Mr. Hussey's stirring. It seems a shame to wake her.

DIANNE (*opening her eyes*). I am not asleep, ma petite... only daydreaming. (*She props her head on a pillow.*) What is it, Mr. Hussey?

MR. HUSSEY (*crossing to Dianne*). I'm sorry to disturb you, Miss, but I want to make sure we get away no later than five. Sooner, if my horses are ready.

DIANNE. Of course, whatever you say. I shall see that the young ladies are ready whenever you are. What time is it now?

MR. HUSSEY (*sheepishly*). I was just going to ask you, Miss. My old ticker seems to have stopped dead at twelve o'clock. Today of all days in the whole bloomin' year.

DIANNE. Miranda, you have your pretty little diamond watch, can you tell us the time?

MIRANDA. I'm sorry, Mam'selle. I don't wear it anymore. I can't stand hearing it ticking all day long just above my heart.

IRMA. If it were mine, I would never take it off. Not even in the bath. Would you, Mr. Hussey? (*Suddenly, MISS McCRAW jerks into motion, feels into the folds of her bodice and pulls out an old-fashioned repeater on a chain. She looks at it strangely.*)

MISS McCRAW. Stopped at twelve. Never stopped before... My papa's. (*MR. HUSSEY stands, looking at the sun, shading his eyes.*)

MR. HUSSEY. Shall I put the billy on again for a cup of tea before we go? Say, in about an hour from now?

MARION. An hour. (*She finds some paper and a ruler in a bag on the tablecloth.*) I should like to make a few measurements at the base of the Rock if we have time.

MIRANDA. Oh, do let us have permission to walk to the lower slope before tea.

IRMA. I'd like to go, too. We are seniors.

DIANNE. Well... (*MISS McCRAW slumps down with her book.*)

How far is it as the cock crows, Miranda?

MARION (*answering first*). Only a few hundred yards. We'll have to walk along by the creek which will take a little longer.

EDITH (*yawning*). May I come, too? I ate so much pie at lunch I can hardly keep awake.

MIRANDA (*nodding*). Don't worry about us, Mam'selle, dear. We'll only be gone a very little while. Come on, follow me.

(*MIRANDA, EDITH, MARION and IRMA exit L. DIANNE stands, watching them go. ALBERT and MICHAEL enter R and sit on the ground.*)

DIANNE. Mon Dieu! Now I know...

MISS McCRAW. What do you know?

DIANNE. Miranda is... well... A Botticelli angel. (*She shrugs.*)

(*Lights crossfade to C and R. DIANNE, MISS McCRAW, MR. HUSSEY and all other Appleyard GIRLS exit. MICHAEL, a fair, slender young man in English riding breeches, reads a magazine, while ALBERT, a bit older, tanned, and wearing a coachman's outfit, dries three champagne glasses with a dish-rag. On his arms is a distinct tattoo of several mermaids. MIRANDA, EDITH, MARION and IRMA appear UC, on the platform. MIRANDA surveys the landscape, while the others stand beside her.*)

MIRANDA. We really must find a suitable place to cross over, or we'll see nothing before we have to turn back. (*MARION leans down to take a measurement.*)

MARION. At least four feet and no stepping stones, this next stream. (*IRMA leans against a rock.*)

IRMA. I vote we take a flying leap and hope for the best.

MIRANDA. Can you manage it, Edith?

EDITH. I don't know. I don't want to wet my feet.

MARION. Why not?

EDITH. I might get pneumonia and die and then you'd stop teasing me and be sorry. (*ALBERT, at R, whistles at the girls. MIRANDA looks at him, and then turns to face upstage, jump-*

ing into the darkness, exiting. IRMA follows, then MARION. EDITH hesitates, then with a fluster, disappears as well.)

MICHAEL. Can I lend a hand with those glasses?

ALBERT. No, you can't. I'm only giving 'em a bit of a lick over so Cook won't rouse on me when I get home.

MICHAEL. Oh... I see... I'm afraid I don't know much about washing up... Look here, Albert... I hope you won't mind my saying so, but I wish you hadn't done that just now.

ALBERT. Done what, Mr. Michael?

MICHAEL. Whistled at those girls when they were going to jump over the creek.

ALBERT. It's a free country as far as I know. What's the harm in a whistle?

MICHAEL. Only that you're such a good chap, and nice girls don't like being whistled at by fellows they don't know.

ALBERT. Don't you believe it! The sheilas is all alike when it comes to the fellers. Do you reckon they come from Apleyard College?

MICHAEL. Albert, I've only been in Australia a few weeks... How should I know who they are? As a matter of fact, I only saw them for a moment when I heard you whistle and looked up.

ALBERT. Well, you can take my word for it. And I've knocked about a fair bit... It's all the same if it's a bloody college they come from or the Ballarat Orphanage where me and my kid sister was dragged up.

MICHAEL (*slowly*). I'm sorry. I didn't know you were an orphan.

ALBERT (*rising, putting glasses in leather case*). As good as. After me mum cleared out with a bloke from Sydney and me dad walked out on the two of us. That's when we was clapped into the bloody orphanage.

MICHAEL (*horrified*). An orphanage? Tell me, if you don't mind talking about it, what's it like to be brought up in one of those places?

ALBERT. Lousy.

MICHAEL. Lord, how revolting.

ALBERT. Oh, it was clean enough, in its own way. No lice or anything except when some poor little bugger of a kid gets

sent there with nits in its head and Matron gets out a bloody great pair of scissors and cuts its hair off.

MICHAEL (*fascinated*). Go on, tell me some more about it... Did they let you see much of your sister?

ALBERT. Well, you see, there was bars on all the windows in my day, boys in one classroom, girls in another. Jeez, I haven't thought about that bloody dump for donkey's years.

MICHAEL (*seriously*). Don't talk so loud. If my aunt hears you swearing she'll try and make Uncle give you the sack!

ALBERT (*grinning*). Not him. The Colonel knows I look after his horses damn well and don't drink his whisky... Well, hardly ever. Tell you the truth, I can't stand the stink of the stuff. This 'ere French fizz of your uncle's will do me. Nice and light on the stomach, Mr. Michael.

MICHAEL. I say, Albert. I wish you'd cut out that Mr. Michael stuff. It doesn't sound like Australia and anyway, my name's Mike to you. Unless my aunt's listening.

ALBERT. Have it your way. Mike? Is that short for the Honorable Michael Fitzhubert what's on your letters? Jeez. What a mouthful! I wouldn't recognize my name if I was to see it written down in print... My dad used to change his name now and then when he got in a tight corner. I forget what they signed us up at the orphanage. Not that I bloody well care. As far as I'm concerned, one bloody name's the same as another.

MICHAEL. I like talking to you, Albert. Somehow you always get me thinking.

ALBERT (*rising*). Thinking's all right if you've got the time for it. I'd better be harnessing up the horses or your auntie's fur will be flying. She wants to get off early.

MICHAEL. Righto. I'll just stretch my legs before we go.

ALBERT. Stretch his legs, is it? I don't mind betting you want another look at them sheilas... that little beaut with the curls...

MICHAEL (*looking into the distance*). In England, they wouldn't let school girls set out alone in late afternoon, but this is Australia... anything can happen. I wonder what the name of the tall, pretty one was?

(ALBERT laughs, and crosses off-stage. The lights crossfade to UC. MIRANDA, MARION, IRMA and EDITH appear, all having loosened their clothing even further. They sit down on the rocks, breathless from the climb.)

MIRANDA. Edith, don't look at your boots. Look up at the sky.
(The GIRLS study the rock formations, which seem to glow a burning red in the lights.)

MARION. Those peaks... they must be a million years old.

EDITH. A million. Oh, how horrible. Miranda, did you hear that? Miranda! It's not true, is it? *(MIRANDA merely smiles at her.)*

IRMA. My papa made a million out of a mine once -- in Brazil. He bought Mama a ruby ring.

EDITH. Money's quite different.

MARION. Whether Edith likes it or not, that fat little body of hers is made up of millions and millions of cells.

EDITH *(putting her hands over her ears)*. Stop it, Marion. I don't want to hear about such things.

MARION. And what's more, you little goose, you've already lived for millions and millions of seconds.

EDITH *(growing pale)*. Stop it! You're making me feel giddy!

MIRANDA. Don't tease her, Marion. The poor child's over-tired.

EDITH *(rubbing her legs)*. Yes, and those nasty ferns are pricking my legs. Why can't we all sit down on that log and look at the ugly old Rock from here?

MARION. Because... You insisted on coming with us, and we three seniors want a closer view of the Hanging Rock before we go home.

EDITH *(whimpering)*. It's nasty here. I never thought it would be so nasty or I wouldn't have come.

MARION *(matter-of-factly)*. I always thought she was a stupid child and now I know.

IRMA. Never mind, Edith. You can go home soon and have some more of Saint Valentine's lovely cake and be happy.
(MIRANDA stands and stares at the peaks.)

MIRANDA. Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place. *(She shades her eyes with her hands and con-*

tinues to look up.) I have a feeling there used to be a track somewhere up there. I remember my father showing me a picture of people in old-fashioned dresses having a picnic at the Rock. I wish I knew where it was painted.

MARION (*with her pencil in hand*). They may have approached it from the opposite side. (*She sketches in the dirt.*) In those days, they probably drove from Mount Macedon. The thing I should like to see are those queer balancing boulders we noticed this morning from the drag.

MIRANDA. We can't go much further. Remember, girls, I promised Mademoiselle we wouldn't be away long. (*IRMA stands beside Miranda.*)

IRMA. Well, let's at least climb these little rises. Whoever invented female fashions for nineteen hundred should be made to walk through bracken fern in three layers of petticoats. (*IRMA, MIRANDA, MARION and finally EDITH climb on the rock shapes. IRMA stands on top of a rock point. She looks at the picnic ground below.*) There's Mr. Hussey. There's Mademoiselle's parasol open like a blue flower!

MARION. Let's rest a bit up here before we head back to the creek and join them.

IRMA (*wildly*). If only we could stay out all night and watch the moon rise. Now, don't look so serious, Miranda, darling. We don't often have a chance to enjoy ourselves out of school.

MARION. And without being watched and spied on by that little rat of a Lumley.

EDITH. Blanche says she knows for a fact Miss Lumley only cleans her teeth on Sundays.

MARION. Blanche is a disgusting little know-all. And so are you.

EDITH. Blanche says Sara writes poetry. In the dunnie, you know. She found one on the floor all about Miranda. (*MIRANDA takes off her shoes and throws them to the ground.*)

IRMA. Poor little Sara. I don't believe she loves anyone in the world except you.

MARION. I can't think why.

MIRANDA (*gently*). She's an orphan.

IRMA. Sara reminds me of a little deer Papa brought home once. The same frightened eyes. I looked after it for weeks but Mama said it would never survive in captivity. *(Takes off her shoes and throws them both to the ground.)*

EDITH. And did it?

IRMA. It died. Mama always said it was doomed.

EDITH. Doomed? What's that mean, Irma?

IRMA. Doomed to die, of course, like that boy who "stood on the burning deck, whence all but he had fled, tra... la-la..." I forget the rest of it.

EDITH. Oh, how nasty! *(Climbs off the rock.)* Do you think I'm doomed, girls? I'm not feeling at all well, myself. Do you think that boy felt sick in the stomach like me?

MARION *(takes off her shoes)*. Certainly, if he'd eaten too much chicken pie for his lunch. Edith, I do wish you'd stop talking for once. *(She throws her shoes to the ground as well. EDITH starts crying. MIRANDA climbs off the rock and strokes her head gently, looking at Marion with mild reproach. IRMA jumps down off her rock and starts to dance around Miranda and Edith. MARION watches from above. IRMA pretends to be a ballerina. MARION jumps down from her rock. MIRANDA tugs on Marion's sleeve, as EDITH watches first IRMA, then MIRANDA and MARION walk away very slowly.)*

EDITH. Irma, where in the world do they think they're going without their shoes? *(IRMA laughs.)* They must be mad. *(The four GIRLS weave in and out between the rock formations. Edith is the last in line, Miranda the first.)*

IRMA. Whatever can those people be doing down there like a lot of ants? *(Distant noises sounding like drum beats can be heard, as if coming from the picnic grounds below.)*

MARION *(looking over her shoulder)*. A surprising number of human beings are without purpose. Although it's probable, of course, that they are performing some necessary function unknown to themselves.

MIRANDA *(shouting)*. There it is. And here's a nice spot to rest in. *(After staring upwards, MIRANDA, MARION, IRMA and EDITH crawl into the cradle of a rock formation and*

close their eyes. Lights shift subtly as twilight begins to fall. EDITH cannot close her eyes for long, however.)

EDITH. Where am I? Miranda, I feel awful. (*MIRANDA, MARION and IRMA open their eyes.*) Miranda, I feel perfectly awful! When are we going home? Miranda, can't you see me? (*MIRANDA stares at EDITH, wordlessly. Then she climbs through a rock and disappears, off-stage. MARION and IRMA follow her. Edith is left alone on stage. She screams.*) Miranda! Miranda! Come back, all of you! Don't go up there... Come back! Miranda! (*She tears at her dress collar.*) Come back! Come back! (*EDITH starts to scream and seems immobilized until finally she starts to run the opposite direction from the other girls. Lights fade to black.*)

SCENE THREE

SCENE: *Back at Appleyard College, UL, MRS. APLEYARD sits in her private study with little Sara Waybourne. The study consists of a desk and two chairs. SARA forlornly sits in a chair, gazing at Mrs. Appleyard, who sits in a large chair, that suits her like a throne, behind the desk.*

MRS. APLEYARD. Well, Sara, I hope you have learned your poetry so that you can go into the garden for what's left of the evening. Minnie will bring you some tea and cake. (*SARA only shifts in her chair and does not answer.*) Well? Stand up straight when you answer me, please, and put your shoulders back. You are getting a dreadful stoop. Now, then. Have you got your lines by heart?

SARA. It's no use, Mrs. Appleyard. I can't learn them.

MRS. APLEYARD. How do you mean you can't, considering you have been alone with your reader ever since lunch?

SARA. I have tried. But it's so silly. I mean if there was any sense in it I could learn it ever so much better.

MRS. APLEYARD. Sense? You little ignoramus. Evidently you don't know that Mrs. Felicia Hemans is considered one of the finest of our English poets.

SARA (*scowling*). I know another bit of poetry by heart. It has ever so many verses. Much more than "The Hesperus." Would that do?

MRS. APPLEBYARD (*rubbing her hands*). Hmm... What is this poem called?

SARA. "An Ode to Saint Valentine." (*She smiles.*)

MRS. APPLEBYARD. I'm not acquainted with it. Where did you find it, Sara... this, er, ode?

SARA. I didn't find it. I wrote it.

MRS. APPLEBYARD. You wrote it? No, I don't wish to hear it, thank you. Strange as it may seem, I prefer Mrs. Hemans. Give me your book and proceed to recite to me as far as you have gone.

SARA. I tell you, I can't learn that silly stuff if I sit here for a week.

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Then you must go on trying a little longer. I'd like you to go now, Sara, and I expect you to be word perfect when I send Miss Lumley in, in half an hour. Otherwise, I'm afraid I'll have to send you to bed instead of sitting up until the others return for supper after the picnic. Go now.

(SARA exits, and MRS. APPLEBYARD rings the bell on her desk. MINNIE, the maid, enters. Her cap is crooked, but otherwise she's dressed properly in a maid's uniform.)

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Is Tom about still, Minnie?

MINNIE. I don't know, Mum. I'll ask Cook.

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Well, see if you can find him and send him to me as soon as you do.

(MINNIE exits. As she does, DORA LUMLEY enters, dressed in a brown dress with her hair pulled back in a bun.)

DORA. I wonder where the picnickers are...

MRS. APPLEBYARD (*sighing*). Mr. Hussey's always right on time. Well, about the Waybourne girl. I want you to check on her progress on the poem, and if she doesn't know it, she's to go to bed without supper. I'd give her a few more minutes...

DORA. The whole poem?

MRS. APPLEBYARD. The whole poem.

(IRISH TOM enters, tucking his shirt into his pants. DORA exits.)

IRISH TOM. Yes, Ma'am? You were wanting after me, so Minnie was saying?

MRS. APPLEBYARD *(rising)*. Tom, do you realize that Mr. Hussey is shockingly late?

IRISH TOM. Is that a fact, Ma'am?

MRS. APPLEBYARD. He promised faithfully this morning to have them back here by eight o'clock. It's now half past ten. How long would you say it takes to drive from the Hanging Rock?

IRISH TOM. Well, it's a fair step from here...

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Think carefully, please. You are familiar with the roads.

IRISH TOM. Hours, I'd say...

MRS. APPLEBYARD *(rising, pacing)*. Hussey intended to leave the picnic grounds soon after four o'clock. Directly after tea. Don't stand there gaping at me like an idiot! What do you think has happened?

IRISH TOM *(with good nature)*. Now, don't you be distressing yourself, Ma'am. It's five grand horses he's driving and him the best coachman this side of Benigo.

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Don't you think I know all that? The point is... have they had an accident?

IRISH TOM. An accident, Ma'am? Well, now, I never so much as gave it a thought, such a fine night and all...

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Then you're a bigger fool than I thought. I know nothing of horses but they can bolt. Do you hear me, Tom? Horses can bolt. For God's sake, say something!

IRISH TOM. If you'd like to sit down for a wee while, Minnie can bring you a cup of tea... *(Noises begin, lots of shouting. GIRLS start shouting as well.)*

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Listen, what's that? God be praised... I can hear them now!

IRISH TOM. I'd better help 'em in...

(IRISH TOM exits. More commotion is heard in the hallway. MRS. APLEYARD smooths her dress and her hair down, and sits again in her chair, posing, waiting for a report. DIANNE comes into the room, crying.)

MRS. APLEYARD *(startled)*. Mademoiselle? What's the meaning of this?

DIANNE. Mrs. Appleyard, something terrible has happened.

MRS. APLEYARD. An accident? Speak up, I want to know the truth.

DIANNE. It's so dreadful... I don't know how to begin.

MRS. APLEYARD. Compose yourself. A fit of hysterics will get you nowhere. And where in heaven's name is Miss McCraw?

DIANNE. We left her behind, at the Rock.

MRS. APLEYARD. Left her behind? Has Miss McCraw taken leave of her senses?

(MR. HUSSEY pushes forward and enters.)

MR. HUSSEY. Mrs. Appleyard, may I speak to you alone? I think the French lady is going to faint.

(DIANNE falls into a chair, with MR. HUSSEY catching her. MRS. APLEYARD rings the bell. MINNIE comes running in, with COOK behind her.)

MRS. APLEYARD. Smelling salts for Mademoiselle at once, and then get her to bed, please.

COOK *(taking one of Dianne's arms)*. Poor thing, she looks worn out. Whatever can have happened at the picnic? *(MINNIE takes Dianne's other arm, and they help her out of the room.)*

MRS. APLEYARD. Now, Mr. Hussey.

MR. HUSSEY. If I might have a drop of spirits, Ma'am, before I begin.

MRS. APLEYARD. You may... I see you're exhausted. Tell me briefly and plainly what has happened.

MR. HUSSEY. Well, after the two teachers and myself realized that nobody in our party had the correct time, both my own watch and Miss McCraw's having stopped during the drive out, it was agreed that we should leave the picnic grounds as soon as convenient after lunch... The French lady arranged we should have some tea and cake. *(He wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.)* I went over to tell the two ladies in charge when the tea was ready. The elderly teacher, who had been sitting reading under a tree when I had last seen her, wasn't there. In fact, I never saw her again...

(Lights fade on MR. HUSSEY and MRS. APPLEYARD. They exit. Lights crossfade to DL, and come up on CONSTABLE BUMPHER, who talks with DOCTOR MCKENZIE, outside on the verandah. BUMPHER stands and reads from a report while DOCTOR MCKENZIE listens, sitting on a bench.)

BUMPHER. He says none of the girls saw which way Miss McCraw went. Mademoiselle De Poitiers frantic, et cetera, et cetera. All three girls, Miss Miranda... whatever-her-last-name, Miss Irma Leopold, Miss Marion Quade, are reliable, in his opinion... Searched the grounds, banged on a drum, et cetera.

MCKENZIE. Horrible.

BUMPHER *(continuing)*. After an hour, Miss Edith Horton, here I quote, "Came running out of the scrub near the south western base of the Rock, crying and laughing and with her dress torn to ribbons. I thought she was going to have a fit of hysterics. She said she had left the other three girls 'somewhere up there,' pointing to the Rock, but seemed to have no idea which direction. We asked her over and over again to try and remember which way they had gone, but all we could get out of her was that she had got frightened and had run back downhill all the way."

MCKENZIE. Perhaps she fell and has a concussion. *(BUM-PHER puts document down on a bench.)*

BUMPHER. All this yesterday evening.

(MRS. APLEYARD enters with DORA. BUMPHER and McKENZIE rise together.)

MRS. APLEYARD. Gentlemen, I'm so relieved you're here. I'm sorry to say that Mademoiselle is confined to her bed with a migraine today. However, Edith is waiting for the doctor down the hall. Miss Dora Lumley will be present during the examination.

McKENZIE. As you wish.

DORA. This way, Doctor. (DORA exits with McKENZIE.)

MRS. APLEYARD (smiling). Please, Constable Bumpher, sit back down. (She motions for him to sit on the bench, which he does.) I certainly hope that you're doing all that needs to be done. We must get to the bottom of this at once!

BUMPHER. We've a search party right now on the Rock. And I've arranged to interview the two lads who were the last to see the missing girls crossing the creek. Mr. Hussey and Mademoiselle have made their statements. The only one left to see is Miss Edith.

MRS. APLEYARD. The whole thing is dreadful. Dreadful. Not a word must go beyond these halls! Imagine if they knew at church. It would be all over the county.

BUMPHER. In my private opinion, the whole affair will be cleared up within a few hours. You've no idea how many people get themselves lost if they stray off a beaten path.

MRS. APLEYARD. I wish I could agree with you. My head girl, Miranda, was born and bred in the Bush, but with regards to the governess, Miss McCraw...

BUMPHER. Perhaps the lady had some private arrangements of her own? To meet a friend or friends, for instance, outside the gates?

MRS. APLEYARD. Definitely no. Miss Greta McCraw, whom I've employed for several years, to my knowledge has not a single friend, or acquaintance even, on this side of the world.

BUMPHER (taking notes). Her book was found with her kid gloves exactly where she had been sitting.

MRS. APPLEYARD. Yes. I suppose no matter how smart at figures you are, you could lose your way in the wood on any given day.

(McKENZIE returns with EDITH, who is dressed in a red cashmere nightgown. BUMPER rises. EDITH looks very pale. McKENZIE helps her sit down on the bench.)

MRS. APPLEYARD. Edith. There now. Sit down for just a few minutes.

McKENZIE. She's in good form, due to all the screaming she did on the Rock. Nature's answer to hysteria... However, I'm worried about her memory loss...

BUMPER. Memory loss? (After a pause.) Can I question her?

McKENZIE. Edith?

EDITH *(faintly)*. I'll try.

BUMPER. Yesterday, when you were with Miranda, Irma and Marion, you crossed over the stream and kept climbing up the Rock. What happened after that?

EDITH. I don't know.

BUMPER. You were on the Rock and something frightened you, made you start to run down the hill. What was it?

EDITH *(with increasing tension)*. I don't know.

BUMPER. You ran down the hill. Did you pass anything or anyone? Were you chased? Think hard now, Edith, so that we can find your friends.

EDITH *(shouting)*. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. And I don't want to write an essay about it.

(Lights crossfade to Michael's bedroom in the Fitzhubert Lodge, on a slight platform UR. There is a table, a bed and a chair. McKENZIE, EDITH and MRS. APPLEYARD exit. BUMPER crosses to the bedroom. MICHAEL paces, waiting for him. MICHAEL appears depressed.)

BUMPER. Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Fitzhubert. Good of you to see me in your home.

MICHAEL *(quietly)*. Quite all right. *(Motions for BUMPER to sit.)*

BUMPHER (*sitting*). I think, sir, we'd better start off with a few questions, just to get the general picture, so to speak. Now then, when you saw the girls crossing the creek, did you recognize any of them?

MICHAEL. How could I? I've only been in Australia about three weeks and haven't met any young girls.

BUMPHER. I see. (*Taking notes.*) Did you have any conversation with any of these girls, either before or after they crossed to the opposite bank?

MICHAEL. Certainly not! I've just told you, Constable, I didn't even know any of them by sight.

BUMPHER. How about Crundall? Did he speak to any of these girls?

MICHAEL. No. Only stared and whistled at them.

BUMPHER. And your aunt and uncle. What were they doing at this time?

MICHAEL. They were both dozing, as far as I can remember. We had champagne for lunch and I suppose it made them sleepy.

BUMPHER. And what effect does champagne have on you?

MICHAEL (*surprised*). None as far as I know. I don't drink much at any time and when I do it's usually wine, you know, at home.

BUMPHER. Well, then, you were perfectly clear in the head and sitting with a book under a tree when you saw them crossing the creek. Now suppose you go on from there. Just try and remember any little detail even if it seems unimportant now. You understand of course that this is an entirely voluntary statement on your part?

MICHAEL (*nodding, quietly*). I watched the three of them crossing the creek... They all did it differently.

BUMPHER. Speak up, please. How do you mean differently? Ropes? Vaulting poles?

MICHAEL. No. I only mean some of them were more agile, you know, more graceful. Anyway, as soon as we were out of earshot, I got up and went over to speak to Albert who was washing some glasses at the creek. We had a bit of a talk. Then I took a stroll, walking towards the Hanging Rock. The girls were already out of sight. I remember thinking the scrub

looked pretty thick for girls to tackle in light summer dresses, and expected to see them coming down any minute. I sat down for a few minutes on a fallen tree. When Albert called out, I came back immediately, I can't think of anything else. Will that do?

BUMPHER. Nicely, thank you, Mr. Fitzhubert. We may get you to help us again later. Only one more thing. You mentioned seeing three girls crossing the creek. Is that correct?

MICHAEL. I'm sorry. You're right, of course. There were four girls.

BUMPHER. What made you forget there were four of 'em, do you think?

MICHAEL. Because I forgot the little fat one, I suppose.

BUMPHER. So you looked pretty closely at the other three, didn't you?

MICHAEL. No, I didn't... I... No.

BUMPHER. I suppose you would have remembered if there was an elderly lady with them?

MICHAEL. Of course I would. There was no one else. Only the four girls.

BUMPHER. Thank you, Mr. Fitzhubert. That will be all. You can send in your coachman. Hope you'll stay around for a while, until we get this thing cleared up. Would you mind bringin' in Albert? I'll need to see him alone, for a few minutes.

(MICHAEL nods, turns, as if he's going to say something else, then exits. ALBERT enters, wearing his coachman's uniform. ALBERT is in good spirits.)

ALBERT *(sits)*. How are you, Mr. Bumpher? Missed you at the cockfight Friday night.

BUMPHER *(stands)*. Hello, Albert. Couldn't make it. Maybe the next one. Or maybe not, if we don't get this matter cleared up.

ALBERT. Now I told you, I only seen them sheilas once.

BUMPHER *(sits opposite ALBERT)*. All right. Now, how many girls did you see crossing the creek?

ALBERT. Four. I suppose you know that this is a statement what I give to the police free, gratis, and for nothing. I'm only doing it to oblige. Caramel? *(Pulls candy from his pocket.)*

BUMPHER. No, thank you. What did you do after Mr. Fitzhubert started to walk towards the Rock?

ALBERT *(eating candy)*. The Colonel wakes up and starts hollering it's time to go home and I goes after Mr. Michael and blow me if he isn't sitting down on a log and the sheilas out of sight. Then Michael gets on that Arab pony and rides home.

BUMPHER. All right. *(He scribbles.)*

ALBERT *(standing)*. No more questions? Then I'll be off.

BUMPHER. There is one more. When Mr. Fitzhubert mounted his pony, did he ride home with the wagonette all the way?

ALBERT. I haven't got eyes in the back of my bloody head. He rode behind us some of the way so as we wouldn't get his dust and some of the way he was ahead, according to the road. I didn't take that much notice except that we all arrived at the front gates here at Lake View at the same time.

BUMPHER. What time was that, do you think?

ALBERT. 'Round about half past seven it must have been. Cook had my dinner waiting in the oven.

BUMPHER. Thank you, Albert. This interview will be written out in full and shown to you later for your approval. See you 'round and about, eh? *(ALBERT stands, grinning, and nearly knocks over his chair. He exits. BUMPHER watches him go, then shakes his head.)* I don't know about that one, I just don't know. *(Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE FOUR

SCENE: *Several days later. On the Rock. The jagged peaks are again visible UC. Assembled at the Rock, DC, are BUMPHER, EDITH and DIANNE. They stand looking up at the Rock. DIANNE dabs her eyes and wears a shady hat. Edith, dressed*

in a smock, clearly does not want to be here. After a pause, BUMPHER turns to Edith, and talks to her gently.

BUMPHER. All of us grown-ups trying to make you remember may have got you more bamboozled than ever. I've known people with shocking memories turn into quite useful witnesses once they get back to where they started, so to speak. We'll try and take it easy this time. Would you like some lemonade? (*EDITH nods, and BUMPHER takes lemonade out of a basket. He pours her a cup. DIANNE puts down a small blanket. They sit. EDITH drinks her lemonade.*)

DIANNE (*looking at the Rock*). The ferns frame the Rock like blue lace.

BUMPHER (*smiling*). Now, Miss Edith. In which direction do you say you began walking the other day when you started off from this very spot?

EDITH. I *don't* say. I told you. Or that gum tree's the same as the other to me.

DIANNE. Edith, *chérie*, perhaps you could tell the Sergeant what you four were chattering of just then? I'm sure they were chattering, Mr. Bumpher...

BUMPHER. That's right. That's the idea. Miss Edith, did anyone suggest which way they wanted to go?

EDITH. Marion Quade was teasing me. Marion can be very disagreeable sometimes. She said those peaky things up there were a million years old.

BUMPHER. The Peaks. So you were walking towards the Peaks?

EDITH (*finishes her lemonade*). I suppose so. My feet were hurting and I didn't pay much attention. I wanted to sit down on a fallen tree instead of going on but the others wouldn't let me. (*BUMPHER smiles at Dianne.*)

BUMPHER. Now that you've remembered about the log, Miss Edith, perhaps you will think of something else? Just take a look around from here and see if there's anything at all that you can recognize. Stumps, ferns, queer-shaped stones...

EDITH (*looking quickly*). No. There isn't.

BUMPHER. Oh, well. Never mind. Where would you like to eat our sandwiches, Mademoiselle?

DIANNE. I think this spot is fine. (*BUMPHER takes some sandwiches out of the basket and passes one each to DIANNE and EDITH. He takes one himself. EDITH starts to eat immediately.*)

EDITH (*with a mouthful*). Mr. Bumper, there is one thing I seem to remember.

BUMPHER. Fine. What is it?

EDITH. A cloud. A funny sort of cloud.

BUMPHER. A cloud. Fine. Except that clouds unfortunately have a way of moving from one place to another in the sky, you know.

EDITH (*formally*). I am quite aware of that. Only this one was a nasty red color and I remember it because I looked up and saw it through some branches... (*She takes a bite of her sandwich.*) It was just after I passed Miss McCraw.

BUMPHER (*dropping his sandwich*). Miss McCraw? Stone the crows. You never told us you saw Miss McCraw! (*He finds his notebook.*) I don't know if you realize, Miss Edith, that what you've just told me is very important. (*DIANNE puts down her sandwich.*)

EDITH (*smugly*). That's why I'm telling you.

BUMPHER. When did your teacher join up with you and the other three girls? Think very hard, please!

EDITH. She's not my teacher. (*Eats again.*) My mamma didn't want me to do senior mathematics. She says a girl's place is in the home.

BUMPHER (*grinning, prodding*). Quite so. Very sensible lady, your mother... Now go on, please. About Miss McCraw. Where was she when you suddenly looked up and saw her? Close by? A long way off?

EDITH. She seemed to be quite a long way off.

BUMPHER (*excited*). A hundred yards? Fifty yards?

EDITH. I don't know. I'm not much good at sums. I told you, I only saw her in the distance through the trees as I was running back to the creek.

BUMPHER. You were running downhill, of course?

EDITH. Of course.

BUMPHER. And Miss McCraw was walking uphill in the opposite direction. Is that correct?

EDITH (*wriggles, then starts giggling*). Ha, ha.

DIANNE. What is it?

EDITH (*laughing, covering her mouth*). She did look so funny!

BUMPHER. Why? Why did she look so funny?

EDITH. I'd rather not say.

DIANNE. Please tell, Edith. You're giving Mr. Bumper such valuable help.

EDITH. Her skirt.

DIANNE. What about her skirt?

EDITH (*giggling*). It's too rude to say out loud in mixed company. (*She looks at BUMPHER.*)

BUMPHER. You don't need to mind about me. I'm old enough to be your dad... that's the idea. (*EDITH motions for DIANNE to lean over. EDITH whispers in Dianne's ear. DIANNE listens.*)

DIANNE (*sitting back up*). She says, Constable, that Miss McCraw was not wearing a skirt, only les pantalons, underwear.

BUMPHER. Drawers. I see. Now then, Miss Edith. You're positive this woman you saw in the distance walking uphill through the trees was really Miss McCraw?

EDITH (*restless*). Positive.

BUMPHER (*clearing his throat*). Ahh. Wasn't it a bit hard to recognize her without her dress?

EDITH. Not at all. None of the other teachers are such a peculiar shape. Irma Leopold told me once, "The McCraw is exactly the same shape as a flat iron."

BUMPHER. Is there anything else? Can you remember anything else? Did she speak to you?

EDITH. I don't think so. I don't know. I wonder, are there still search parties going on? Mrs. Appleyard seems most anxious to have them found...

BUMPHER. After bringing in the bloodhound, we've searched all we can, at least until new developments.

(DIANNE starts to repack the picnic basket. BUMPHER helps her. When it's time to refold the blanket, EDITH has to be prodded off of it. DIANNE puts the folded blanket into the basket. DIANNE, EDITH and BUMPHER exit. Lights crossfade

to SARA WAYBOURNE, who sits on a bench in an isolated light, crying to herself.)

SARA. I hate her... I hate her. Oh, Bertie, Bertie, where are you? Jesus, where are you? If you are really watching the sparrows fall like it says in the Bible, why don't you come down and take me away? Miranda says I mustn't hate people even if they're wicked. I can't help it, darling Miranda, wherever you are...

(MRS. APLEYARD enters. She looks crossly at SARA.)

MRS. APLEYARD. Did I hear someone talking?

SARA. No, Mrs. Appleyard.

MRS. APLEYARD. Good, because with all the obnoxious reporters, the curates coming to offer their help, the never-ending discussions with the police, and grieving parents to be notified, the last thing I need is surliness from you. All this and a school to run. I ask you, what in the name of heaven happened on Saturday afternoon? And why, why, why did it happen to three seniors so valuable to the prestige and social standing of the college?

SARA *(teary-eyed)*. I don't know, Mrs. Appleyard. Is there anything else?

MRS. APLEYARD. Yes, indeed there is. Your guardian, Mr. Cosgrove, seems to have fallen behind in payment of your fees. It's so unlike him. He's usually the perfect gentlemen. I would advise that this matter needs to be rectified immediately. Is that understood?

SARA. Yes. Yes, it is.

MRS. APLEYARD *(looking at Sara)*. You're looking pale. Mademoiselle fears you're not sleeping now... Anyway, you must try to get some sleep, Sara.

SARA. May I go now?

MRS. APLEYARD *(sighing)*. Yes.

(SARA exits. MRS. APLEYARD stands, watching her go, then exits. Lights crossfade back to the Rock, DC. MICHAEL and ALBERT enter, with provisions and drinking beers.)

ALBERT. I hear they had the bloodhounds out again yesterday.

MICHAEL. Have they found anything new?

ALBERT. Something about calico underwear to match what the schoolteacher was wearing. But then nothing. What I say is this. If them Russell Street blokes and the abo tracker and the bloody dog can't find 'em, what's the sense of you and me worrying our guts out? We may as well finish our bottles. Plenty of other people have got themselves bushed before today, and as far as I'm concerned that's the stone end of it.

MICHAEL. As far as I'm concerned, it's *not* the end of it. I wake up in a cold sweat every night wondering if they're still alive, dying of thirst somewhere on that infernal Rock at this very minute... while you and I sit here drinking this cold beer.

ALBERT. That's where you and me is different. If you take my advice, the sooner you forget the whole thing, the better.

MICHAEL. I can't forget it. I never will.

ALBERT. And that's why you worked out this plan.

MICHAEL. It's not really so much a plan as a feeling. All my life I've been doing things because other people said they were the right things to do. This time I'm going to do something because *I* say so. Even if you and everyone else think I'm mad.

ALBERT. It's like this. Feeling is all very well but every inch of that bloody Rock has been gone over with a tooth comb. What the hell do you think you can do?

MICHAEL. Then I'll be going up alone.

ALBERT. No, no. I came this far because we're mates. Someone's got to fix it with your uncle later on. (*MICHAEL nods and starts to go through the provisions.*)

MICHAEL. Now look, I've got my flask filled with brandy and matches. You see, I am beginning to know something about the Bush. Was there anything else?

ALBERT (*going through provisions*). Some clean rags and a drop of iodine. You never know what we might find once we start looking. (*MICHAEL frowns.*) Jeez, don't look so bloody miserable. It's your own idea. Say, what's that smell? (*He looks around.*) What's the name of those thingummy-bobs, those flowers over there? Pansies, that's right. They was my kid sister's favorite flowers. Poor little thing. I hope she has a

garden of her own now. As far as I know, some rich old geezer took a fancy to her a few years ago and that's all I ever heard. Tell you the truth, I only seen her once since she left the orphanage. She was a good kid, though. A bit like me. Wouldn't stand no nonsense from nobody. (*Finishes with provisions.*)

MICHAEL. Strange feminine secrets.

ALBERT. What?

MICHAEL. I've been wondering... in those last moments, what strange feminine secrets did they share?

ALBERT (*shaking his head*). This is a wild, bloody goose chase if ever there was one. And you in no mental shape for it. Let's make a plan. I'll take over to the right, and you towards the center. (*ALBERT exits. MICHAEL starts climbing on the rocks, ascending the platform UC.*)

MICHAEL. Hel-lo! Anybody here? Hel-lo! Miranda! Irma! Miss McCraw! Marion!

(*Lights on MICHAEL on the rocks. He climbs to the top of the one Miranda was on in Scene Two. He feels of the rock, and puts his face to it. Insect noises are heard. A funny yell, a "coo-eee" comes from off-stage. MICHAEL jumps off the rock. ALBERT appears.*)

ALBERT. Nothing from my end. Anything here?

MICHAEL. Not yet.

ALBERT. Well, let's get a move on.

MICHAEL. I'm not going home. Not tonight.

ALBERT. Not going home?

MICHAEL. You heard me, didn't you?

ALBERT. Have you gone off your rocker?

MICHAEL. You can tell them at the house that I'm staying the night in Woodend. Any bloody lie you like so long as there's no fussing.

ALBERT. That's the first time I've heard you use language. Tell me, what's the good of you stopping here all night on your Pat Malone?

MICHAEL. That's my business.

ALBERT. Beats me what you're looking for but you won't find it in the dark. I can tell you that much.

MICHAEL. Well, damn you, you... bloody Albert, and the bloody police, and all the bloody so and so's who keep poking their noses into other people's affairs, and who know all about every bloody thing just because they're Australian. Just leave me alone!

ALBERT. You win. *(ALBERT starts to exit.)*

MICHAEL. Look.. I'm sorry I called you all those names just now.

ALBERT. Aw, you done right. If that's the way you was feeling. And mind you, put out the fire before you leave tomorrow. I don't fancy spending me weekend fighting bush fires at Hanging Rock. *(ALBERT exits, after looking back at Michael, anxiously.)*

MICHAEL. Miranda! Miranda, where are you?

(MICHAEL turns and disappears between the rocks. Insect sounds are heard loudly. Lights crossfade to the Fitzhuberts' home, UR, and darkness falls. ALBERT comes into Michael's bedroom. COLONEL FITZHUBERT sits on Michael's bed, playing cards. ALBERT is startled by the COLONEL.)

COLONEL *(looking up)*. Come in, Crundall. For God's sake. Where's Michael?

ALBERT. I have a message from him, sir. I...

COLONEL. Message? Didn't you come home together? What the blazes has gone wrong?

ALBERT *(fidgeting)*. Nothing, sir.

COLONEL. What do you mean, nothing? My nephew never told us he intended to be out for dinner?

ALBERT. He didn't intend to be out that long, sir. The fact is, we left it a bit late starting for home and Mr. Michael reckoned he'd stay the night at the... Macedon Arms and ride home tomorrow.

COLONEL *(throwing down cards)*. Macedon Arms? That miserable little pub near the Woodend Station? Never heard such nonsense!

ALBERT (*gaining confidence*). I think, sir, he thought it'd save any inconvenience this end.

COLONEL. Considering Cook has been keeping his dinner hot for a good three hours...

ALBERT (*sitting*). Between you and me, Mr. Michael was a bit done in after that long ride in the sun this morning.

COLONEL. Where did you go?

ALBERT. A fair way. It was really me put the idea into his head to take it easy and stop the night in Woodend.

COLONEL. So it was your brilliant idea, was it? The boy's all right, I suppose?

ALBERT. Right as rain.

COLONEL. Let's hope the horse is properly stalled for the night, if they have a stable down there. Very well, then. Good night, sir. (*COLONEL gathers cards and rises to go.*)

ALBERT. Good night, sir. Will you be wanting Lancer tomorrow?

COLONEL. Yes. I mean no. Dammit. I can't make any arrangements for Saturday until I've seen my nephew.

ALBERT. Good night, then. (*COLONEL exits. ALBERT throws off some of his gear. He turns off the light by the bed. He lies down and closes his eyes. Wind starts to blow.*)

MICHAEL (*voice recording*). Albert, where are you, Albert?

(ALBERT bolts upright in bed. Then he lays back down again, wiping his forehead. Lights crossfade to the Rock, upstage, and grounds DC. MICHAEL enters. Lights shift to indicate morning. MICHAEL lies with his face down and eyes closed. His clothes are torn, with blood on his face and scratches on his arm. A notebook lies at his side, open. ALBERT enters. He calls.)

ALBERT. Michael! Michael. Hell, I shouldn't've gotten myself mixed up in this. He's gone and lost himself on this bloody Rock. (*ALBERT then sees Michael. He rushes to Michael's side and feels his pulse.*) You'd better still be alive, Mike! If you're not, both the Colonel and I will kill you... Better get the doctor here at once. Mike, can you hear me, hang on... (*ALBERT turns to go and trips over the notebook. He stops to*

pick it up and sees it's open to a message. ALBERT reads the message.) "Albert. Above Bush. My Flags. Hurry. Ring of High. Up High. Hurry. Foun..." Jesus. Above Bush. (*ALBERT puts down the notebook and disappears, circling in between the rocks on the platform. Crying out.*) Jesus!

(ALBERT leans down and picks up the body of IRMA. Her dress is torn, her face is dirty and bloody. She is not wearing stockings. Her eyes are closed and her hair is a mess, with some bugs in it. ALBERT feels her arm. He looks up and then shouts from the platform.)

ALBERT *(shouting)*. Here she is. I got her, Mike. It's a miracle, but there's still a pulse beat. By God, she's alive all right!

BLACKOUT
END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE: *The Fitzhubert Lodge at Lake View. MICHAEL, in a bed, tries to sit up, and moans, holding his ankle. Then, he glances at a calendar on the nearby bed stand. He starts to rip some pages off of it. McKENZIE enters.*

MICHAEL. Oww! What's wrong with me?

McKENZIE (*cheerily*). You've had a pretty bad fall and hurt your ankle and knocked yourself about a bit. Looking better today, though.

MICHAEL. How long have I been ill?

McKENZIE. Let's see. Must be five days since they brought you back from the Hanging Rock.

MICHAEL (*tears two more pages off the calendar*). Hanging Rock? What was I doing at Hanging Rock?

McKENZIE. We'll talk about it later. Nothing to worry about. Never did a sick man any good to worry. Now, let's have a look at your ankle.

MICHAEL. Did I fall off a horse?

McKENZIE. Is this twenty questions? The answer to that is no. You have a swollen ankle and a touch of the sun.

(*MRS. FITZHUBERT, with an air of elegance, enters, carrying a breakfast tray. McKENZIE examines Michael's ankle, unwrapping bandages.*)

MICHAEL. I want to see Albert Crundall.

MRS. FITZHUBERT. My, we are getting better quickly. Now drink up your tea while it's nice and hot. (*Comically, MICHAEL eats his breakfast while McKENZIE examines his ankle. MICHAEL does a balancing act with the tray on his lap.*)

MICHAEL. I want Albert.

MRS. FITZHUBERT. He comes up every morning to ask about you. Such devotion.

MICHAEL (*interested*). What time does he usually come?

MRS. FITZHUBERT. Soon after breakfast... But you're not allowed visitors, you know. Doctor's orders. (*McKENZIE rewraps Michael's ankle.*)

MICHAEL. I want to see Albert, and if you two won't let me, I'll jolly well get out of bed and go down to the stables myself.

MRS. FITZHUBERT. Now, now. Don't get yourself all worked up or we'll have to get your uncle.

MICHAEL. I don't want visitors. I only want Albert.

McKENZIE. All right. For ten minutes. Stay off this, whatever you do. I'll check it again in two days. I'll put out the word downstairs for Albert. (*McKENZIE grins and exits. MRS. FITZHUBERT re-arranges the breakfast table. She picks up the wads of calendar pages and glances sideways at Michael.*)

MRS. FITZHUBERT. You'd best not charge each other up for some adventure. You're going to stay off your feet for quite some time, young man. Auntie's orders.

(MRS. FITZHUBERT carries the wads of paper. As ALBERT enters, she eyes him knowingly. ALBERT smiles. He looks at Michael carefully.)

MRS. FITZHUBERT. So, ten minutes and no excitement. (*She exits.*)

ALBERT. Hello, old invalid. Mind if I smoke?

MICHAEL. Go ahead. They won't let you stay long... Look, there's a lot I have to know. Until last night, my head was in such a muddle that I couldn't think properly. When my aunt was in here talking to the nurse, I think they thought I was asleep, and suddenly it all began to sort itself out. It seems that I went back to the Hanging Rock on my own, without telling anyone but you. Is that right?

ALBERT (*lighting cigarette*). Right. To look for the sheilas. Take it easy, Mike. You don't look too good, yet. How are you, anyway?

MICHAEL. I don't know. I want to get this story straight. I found one of them. Is that right?

ALBERT. You found her and she's up here at the Lodge, alive and kicking.

MICHAEL. Which one?

ALBERT. Irma Leopold. The little one with the curls... So you've got nothing to worry about. Only hurry up and get well. (*MICHAEL sighs, grabs for his cup of tea. ALBERT helps him.*)

MICHAEL. How is she?

ALBERT. They say she's suffering from nothing more serious than shock and exposure. No broken bones, only a few minor cuts and bruises on the face and hands. Her fingernails were badly torn, some bruises on the head.

MICHAEL (*teasing*). You've got the details down. Wonder why?

ALBERT. Just waiting to fill you in.

MICHAEL. There was nothing else?

ALBERT. She's unblemished, as they say.

MICHAEL. Albert.

ALBERT. Well, you were wondering, weren't you? Your aunt and uncle are putting her up until she gets better. A beaut she is, too. Mrs. Cutler's seein' to her.

MICHAEL. Staying here you say, at the Lodge?

ALBERT. That's right.

(*The COLONEL and DOCTOR MCKENZIE enter.*)

COLONEL. So, I hear you're becoming yourself again. Good morning, Michael.

MICHAEL. Good morning, Uncle.

COLONEL. I would say "Good Morning" to Crundall here, except that I'm still sore about all that poppycock he told me that other night about you staying in a pub in Woodend.

MCKENZIE (*gently*). Now, then, Colonel, no good crying over spilt milk. The boy's safe and sound in bed and they've solved part of the college mystery. That's all that matters. As for Crundall, you can thank your lucky stars that he didn't waste any time in going for help. Now, Michael here needs

all the sleep he can get. Visiting is over for today. Maybe more visiting tomorrow.

ALBERT. All right, then. See you. (*ALBERT and the COLONEL exit. McKENZIE hands MICHAEL a book off of a chair.*)

McKENZIE. Here. Give this a good read. And no gallivanting about the Bush.

MICHAEL. Right. (*McKENZIE exits. MICHAEL starts to open the book, then starts flipping through the pages. He then closes the book. He stares out.*) Miranda... (*Lights fade to black.*)

SCENE TWO

SCENE: *Outside at Appleyard College DL, on the verandah, rumors of Irma's reappearance have set the institution buzzing. A special assembly has been called. BLANCHE, ROSAMUND, EDITH, KATIE, FLORA, MICHELLE, SARA, and the staff, MINNIE, COOK, IRISH TOM, DORA and DIANNE line up on the verandah.*

BLANCHE (*giggling*). I hear the nephew, Michael, broke all his teeth from scaling a sixty-foot precipice.

KATIE. I was told that he's madly in love with her.

EDITH. Who?

FLORA. Irma, you dunce.

ROSAMUND (*snickering*). The little heiress sent to Melbourne for two dozen chiffon nightdresses to seduce him... and wears three strings of pearls in bed, to be glamorous. Maybe it will help her remember what really happened up there.

DIANNE (*teasing*). Ce n'est pas gentil, Rosamund.

(*MRS. APPLEYARD enters. She motions for them to sit on the verandah. She brings her bell and rings it to get their attention. ALL sit.*)

MRS. APPLEYARD. Please, be seated. I have a special announcement to make, and I know it will come as a great

shock to some of you. So I'd rather you were seated to begin with. *(She clears her throat.)* Rumors have once again been flying in regards to this college. Muriel's father and his abrupt departure with Muriel yesterday without notice did not help matters any. At any rate, three things. One, Mademoiselle De Poitiers has announced her engagement, and will be leaving us after Easter to marry Louis Montpelier. I know you join me in wishing them eternal felicitation... Second, Mrs. Valange has given her notice, effective immediately. The art direction will be taken over by Miss Lumley until further notice. And, thirdly... Miss Irma Leopold has been found, is alive but just conscious, convalescing at the Fitzhubert Lodge in Lake View... More details forthcoming, Constable Bumpher promises me... *(Gasps are heard from the girls. BLANCHE and ROSAMUND embrace, and wipe some tears away. IRISH TOM throws his hat in the air. COOK and MINNIE embrace.)*

IRISH TOM. Then we heard right after all! Thank God for it.

MRS. APPLEYARD. There is a full hour before classes begin to get your feelings sorted out. I'll expect you to be in proper form then. You're dismissed. All except Sara. I'd like a word with you.

DIANNE *(to BLANCHE)*. Surely this is not a crying matter. *(She wipes her eyes. ALL exit, except for Sara and Mrs. Appleyard. MRS. APPLEYARD motions for SARA to sit down on the verandah while they chat.)*

MRS. APPLEYARD. I have written to your guardian at the usual bank address, remember, about the matter we discussed? But my letters have been returned from the Dead Letter Office.

SARA. Oh.

MRS. APPLEYARD. When did you last have a letter from Mr. Cosgrove? Think most carefully.

SARA. I remember quite well. At Christmas, when he asked if I could stay at school over the holidays.

MRS. APPLEYARD. I remember. It was most inconvenient.

SARA. Was it? I wonder why he hasn't written for such a long time? I want some books and some more crayons.

MRS. APLEYARD. Crayons? That reminds me, since you can give me no help in this unfortunate matter I shall have to tell Miss Lumley to discontinue your drawing lessons, as from this morning. Please note that any drawing materials in your locker are the property of the college and must be returned to Miss Lumley. With a possible five students not returning, we simply cannot afford to advance any fees... Is that a hole in your stocking? You would be better employed learning to darn than playing about with books and colored pencils. (*SARA stands to go.*) I omitted to mention that if I have not heard from your guardian by Easter I shall be obliged to make other arrangements for your education.

SARA. What arrangements?

MRS. APLEYARD. That will have to be decided. There are institutions.

SARA. Oh, no. No. Not that. Not again.

MRS. APLEYARD. One must learn to face up to facts, Sara. After all, you are thirteen years old.

(MRS. APLEYARD exits. SARA sits, stunned, on the steps. DORA walks by and notices Sara.)

DORA. What's the matter, Sara? Are you feeling ill?

SARA. I'm all right. Please go away.

DORA. People don't sit outside by themselves just before class unless they're weak in the head. Would you like some tea?

SARA. I don't want tea. I don't want anything.

DORA. Lucky you. I wish I could say the same. Why just today I wrote my brother about everything and asked him to... Well, anyway, Sara. We seem to be losing students here right and left... If you aren't well, you ought to be in bed. We don't want to lose you, too.

(DORA rises, and exits. SARA pulls her knees up around her ears. Lights fade on SARA. She exits. Lights crossfade to IRMA in bed, UR, at the Fitzhuberts' Lodge. She sits in bed, reading. DIANNE enters.)

DIANNE. You look so beautiful in your Japanese kimono!
(DIANNE crosses into the bedroom and hugs IRMA. IRMA squeals.)

IRMA. Mademoiselle!

DIANNE. Let me look at you, chérie. (She looks at Irma.) Too pale, but so pretty. Do you remember how I scolded you for rubbing geranium petals on your lips! ...But see, I have wonderful news for you! (DIANNE holds out her hand and shows Irma her diamond ring.)

IRMA. I'm so glad, Mademoiselle. Your Louis is a lovely man.

DIANNE. Tiens! You've guessed it already, my secret?

IRMA. I didn't guess, dear Dianne. I knew. Miranda used to say I guessed with my head and knew with my heart.

DIANNE. Ah, Miranda. Only eighteen and such wisdom.

IRMA (changing the subject). The Fitzhubert's are most kind.

DIANNE. And the handsome nephew? Is he also kind? Oh, what a profile he got in the newspapers! And you, too. "GIRL'S BODY ON ROCKS, MISSING HEIRESS FOUND."

IRMA. He can't leave his room. You forget, Dianne, I only saw Michael Fitzhubert once, in the distance, on the day of the picnic.

DIANNE. A woman can see everything necessary in the wink of an eye! When I first see the back of my Louis's head, I say to myself: "Dianne, that man, he is yours."

IRMA. And now he is.

DIANNE. Have you tried to recall anything?

IRMA. I can remember nothing.

DIANNE. Nothing? Ah, well, it's probably just as well.

IRMA. The doctor says it's the shock, you know... Constable Bumper has been questioning me, and probably finds me very stupid...

DIANNE. No. No, I'm sure he doesn't. Maybe your memory will come back in time.

IRMA. Maybe.

(DIANNE pats Irma on the hand. Lights crossfade to MICHAEL, sitting in a chair DR, outside the Fitzhuberts' Lodge. Patterns of tree branches can be seen on a scrim. A pair

of crutches, for his ankle, are leaning against a small table. There is an empty chair next to him. A movement behind the scrim catches his eye. He looks up. MIRANDA is standing there; her silhouette is distinct, her long, straight hair, and the dress that she wore in Scene Two. She tilts her head. MICHAEL stands to greet her. As he does, MIRANDA disappears and the sound of a bird flapping its wings in flight is heard. MICHAEL looks puzzled, frightened. IRMA enters.)

IRMA. I hope you don't mind tea out here in the garden. It's nice to see you.

MICHAEL. Yes, yes, good afternoon, Miss Leopold.

(MRS. FITZHUBERT brings in a tray and puts it on a small table. She helps IRMA sit down in a chair.)

MRS. FITZHUBERT. Michael, tea. *(MICHAEL hobbles to the table.)* Shall I pour?

IRMA. Oh, no, I can manage. Thank you ever so much, Mrs. Fitzhubert.

MRS. FITZHUBERT. I'll just be in the parlor if you need me. *(MRS. FITZHUBERT exits. Michael is morosely silent. IRMA pours the tea. She hands Michael a cup.)*

IRMA. Do you like marrons glacés, the real French ones? I adore them. Deck chairs usually collapse but your aunt says this one is all right... *(She pauses, waiting for him to respond, but continues when he does not.)* My papa is a darling but he refuses to eat out of doors. Calls it barbarous.

MICHAEL *(grinning)*. So does mine. My sisters love anything in the way of a picnic... Oh, heavens, what a tactless idiot I am! The last thing I meant to talk about was a picnic, oh, confound it, there I go again. *(IRMA sips her tea.)*

IRMA. Please, don't look so unhappy. Whether we talk of it or not, that awful thing is always in my mind... always and always.

MICHAEL. And in mine.

IRMA. I'm glad, really, that you mentioned the picnic just now. It makes it easier to thank you for what you did on the Rock.

MICHAEL. It was nothing, nothing at all. Besides, it was really my friend, Albert, you know.

IRMA. No, I don't know. Doctor McKenzie wouldn't let me see the newspapers. Who is this Albert?

MICHAEL. My uncle's coachman. A wonderful chap. And he's the one who found my note and went back up, and brought you down. He's the one who got help for us both, the doctor and the police.

IRMA. When can I meet him? He must think me a monster of ingratitude.

MICHAEL. Not Albert. He's brave, modest, clever... You'll have to get to know him. *(He turns to the tea tray.)* When I was six years old, I ate the whole of my little sister's birthday cake at one go. *(He cuts a cake.)*

IRMA. You'd better cut me a slice before you gobble it all up. *(MICHAEL laughs, then IRMA laughs with him. She looks out over the water.)* It looks beautiful out there on the water.

MICHAEL. If you're feeling up to it, maybe I can take you out in the punt sometime this week.

IRMA. I'd love a row on the lake.

MICHAEL. Soon. While it's still safe. While it's still summer.

IRMA. I can't bear to think of the summer ending. Miranda used to say that everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place. *(MICHAEL puts down his cake.)*

MICHAEL. I'd best be seeing what Uncle's up to, tennis and what-not. *(IRMA, disappointed, nods.)*

IRMA. Please don't let me hold you up.

MICHAEL. Tomorrow then. On the lake.

IRMA. Tomorrow.

MICHAEL. Are you all right here?

IRMA. Yes, yes, really.

(MICHAEL smiles, looks at the tree pattern on the scrim again and exits on crutches. IRMA, alone, sips her tea. ALBERT enters.)

ALBERT *(mumbling)*. Mrs. Fitzhubert wanted to know if you was all right. Or if there's anything...

IRMA *(brightly)*. You are Albert Crundall?

ALBERT. That's me.

IRMA. You know who I am, don't you?

ALBERT. Yes. I know who you are all right. Was you wanting anything, like?

IRMA. I want only to say thank you for having rescued me up there on the Rock.

ALBERT. Oh, that. (*IRMA glances at the mermaid tattoo on his arm.*)

IRMA. Aren't we going to shake hands? You saved my life, you know.

ALBERT. Tell the truth, I never give it another thought once the Doc and Bumper had you safe on the stretcher.

IRMA (*laughing*). Oh, really? You ought to hear what Mr. Michael says about it!

ALBERT. Now there's a wonderful bloke if you like!

IRMA. Exactly what he says about you.

ALBERT. He does? Well, I'll be buggered. Excuse my language, Miss. I don't often get talking to toffs like you. Well, I'd better be getting on with my job.

IRMA. I really like Mr. Michael, too.

ALBERT. Yes, I expect most folks do. He's a regular fellow.

(*MRS. FITZHUBERT enters. She picks up the tray and looks at Albert.*)

MRS. FITZHUBERT. Decided to see what the delay was here.

IRMA. It's all my fault. I wanted to thank Albert. (*ALBERT tips his hat and exits. MRS. FITZHUBERT watches him go. She turns to look at IRMA.*)

MRS. FITZHUBERT. You look a little fatigued. You must drink plenty of milk. You've been thinking about the Rock too much. Remember what Doctor McKenzie told you. The Rock is a nightmare, and nightmares belong to the past. (*IRMA nods. Lights fade to black.*)

SCENE THREE

SCENE: *Many weeks later. MRS. APPLEYARD sits alone in her study, UL. A brandy bottle is out on top of her desk. She sips*

from a snifter. The ledger book of the school accounts are in front of her. With a ruler, she draws a line through another name. Also on top of her desk is an opened letter. MINNIE enters. MRS. APPLEYARD puts away the brandy.

MINNIE. Miss Irma's here for her last good-byes.

MRS. APPLEYARD. Oh, yes. And then she's off to Europe with her family. Well, her timing couldn't be worse. Just today I received a hostile letter from her father. He requests a new and fuller inquiry on events leading up to the picnic. "Not only on behalf of my own daughter, miraculously spared, but for those unfortunate parents who have still learned nothing of their children's fate." He says he's bringing out a top-notch detective from Scotland Yard at his expense.

MINNIE. Shall I bring Miss Irma in?

MRS. APPLEYARD. By all means, do.

(MINNIE exits and, quickly, IRMA appears, dressed in traveling clothes and a hat. Mrs. Appleyard is silent as IRMA enters.)

MRS. APPLEYARD. Be seated, Irma. I hear you are completely restored to health. *(IRMA sits down.)*

IRMA. Thank you, Mrs. Appleyard. I am perfectly well now.

MRS. APPLEYARD. And yet you still recollect nothing of your experiences at the Hanging Rock?

IRMA. Nothing. Doctor McKenzie told me again only yesterday that I may never remember anything after we had begun to walk towards the upper slopes.

MRS. APPLEYARD. Unfortunate. Very. For everyone concerned.

IRMA. You need hardly tell me that, Mrs. Appleyard.

MRS. APPLEYARD. I understand you are leaving for Europe shortly.

IRMA. In a few days, I hope. My parents think it is a good idea to get away from Australia for a time.

MRS. APPLEYARD. I see. *(Rising.)* To be frank with you, Irma, I regret that your parents didn't think fit for you to

complete your education at Appleyard College before embarking on a purely social life abroad.

IRMA. I'm seventeen, Mrs. Appleyard. Old enough to see something of the world.

MRS. APPELYARD. If I may say so, now that you are no longer under my care, your teachers were continually complaining to me of your lack of application. Even a girl with your expectations should be able to spell. (*MRS. APPELYARD immediately regrets saying this, which shows in her face. IRMA is angry.*)

IRMA. Spelling? Would spelling have saved me from whatever it was that happened on the day of the picnic? (*IRMA's fist hits the top of Mrs. Appleyard's desk.*) Let me tell you this, Mrs. Appleyard. Anything of the slightest importance that I learned here at the college I learned from Miranda.

MRS. APPELYARD. It is a pity that you didn't acquire something of Miranda's admirable self-control... (*Trying to regain graciousness.*) Would you care to spend tonight in your old room here on your way to Melbourne?

IRMA. Thank you, no. Mr. Hussey is waiting down there in the drive. But I should like to see the girls and Mademoiselle before I go.

MRS. APPELYARD. By all means, Mademoiselle and Miss Lumley will be taking the class outside on the verandah. For once I think discipline may be relaxed. It is irregular but you may go ahead and walk in and say good-bye. Tell Mademoiselle that you have my permission.

(Lights crossfade to DL, outside on the verandah, where ROSAMUND, BLANCHE, EDITH, KATIE, FLORA and MICHELLE enter in long bloomers, black cotton stockings and white rubber-soled canvas shoes. IRMA and MRS. APPELYARD exit. Violin music is heard, and the GIRLS move in a circle, marching. SARA, with a board strapped to her back for her posture, sits along the side and looks miserable. DIANNE and DORA count out rhythms as the GIRLS march. DORA beats a small drum. None of the marching girls seem to enjoy the exercise.)

DORA. One, two. One, two.

DIANNE (*over the music*). How much longer are you going to leave Sara like that?

DORA. Until her back is straighter. Mrs. Appleyard is worried about her stoop.

DIANNE. It's been on her long enough.

DORA (*to Katie*). Katie, pay attention to the music, please. You are badly out of step.

DIANNE (*in rhythm*). One, two. One, two.

(*IRMA enters. The music stops. DIANNE crosses to her, happy. The other GIRLS stare and stop marching.*)

DIANNE. Come in, Irma! Comme c'est une bonne surprise! Mes enfants, for ten minutes you may talk as you please. Voila, the class is dismissed. (*IRMA pauses uncertainly then walks towards the center of the circle. She smiles at her former classmates. They do not smile back. A cold chill overtakes them. Suddenly, gagging sounds are heard. MICHELLE exits, ill. BLANCHE licks over the bench. EDITH suddenly starts screaming, in hysteria.*) Edith, stop that horrible noise. Blanche! Flora! Be quiet. All of you be quiet. (*DIANNE grabs the drum that Dora had been using. She bangs it to get their attention. But the GIRLS continue to crowd around IRMA, like a mob. Some GIRLS are laughing, others are crying.*)

EDITH. Tell us, Irma!

BLANCHE. Tell us everything! Now!

DORA (*sitting*). It's no use, Mam'selle, they won't take any notice of the drum or anything else. The class is quite out of hand.

DIANNE. Try to get out without them seeing you and bring the Head. This is serious.

DORA (*sneering*). You're afraid, aren't you?

DIANNE. Yes, Miss Lumley. I'm very much afraid.

IRMA. Edith, you! (*DORA moves L and kneels, out of the way.*)

EDITH. Yes, ducky. It's me. Come on, Irma, tell us. We've waited long enough.

FLORA. Edith's right. Tell us, Irma. Tell us.

IRMA. What can I tell you? Have you all gone crazy?

EDITH. The Hanging Rock. We want you to tell us what happened up there to Miranda and Marion Quade.

FLORA. Nobody in this rat hole ever tells us anything.

BLANCHE. Miranda! Marion Quade! Where are they?

IRMA. I can't tell you. I don't know.

DIANNE (*crowding into the girls*). Imbeciles! Have you no brains? No hearts? How can la pauvre Irma tell us something she doesn't know?

BLANCHE. She knows all right, only she won't tell.

FLORA. Irma likes to have grown-up secrets. She always did.

EDITH (*forcefully*). Then I'll tell you if she won't. Listen, all of you. They're dead. Dead. Miranda and Marion and Miss McCraw. All dead as doornails in a nasty old cave full of bats on the Hanging Rock!

DIANNE (*slapping EDITH*). Edith Horton. You're a liar and a fool. Holy Mother of God.

ROSAMUND (*holding up her hands in prayer, on her knees*). Saint Valentine. I don't know how to pray to you properly. Dear Saint Valentine, make them leave Irma alone and love one another, for Miranda's sake.

(IRISH TOM enters. The GIRLS turn to look at him. IRMA uses the moment to shake herself free. ROSAMUND raises from her knees. EDITH rubs her sore cheek.)

IRISH TOM. With Mr. Hussey's compliments, Miss Irma, if you're set on catching the Melbourne Express you'd best come this minute. And good luck to you, Miss, from meself and all in the kitchen.

IRMA. Thank you. I'll come with you, Tom. (*IRMA crosses with IRISH TOM, not looking back, except to get a kiss on the cheek from DIANNE.*)

DIANNE (*sadly*). Your parasol is hanging in the hall, ma chérie. Au revoir, we shall meet again. (*IRMA and IRISH TOM exit.*)

ROSAMUND. Good-bye.

FLORA. 'Bye (*DIANNE tries to recompose herself. She looks at her watch.*)

DIANNE. We are late this afternoon, girls. Go at once to your rooms and change those ugly bloomers to something pretty for supper tonight.

EDITH. Can I wear my pink?

DIANNE. You may wear what you like. (*All the GIRLS exit except for Rosamund and Sara.*)

ROSAMUND. Shall I help you tidy up?

DIANNE. No, thank you, Rosamund. I have a migraine and would like to be alone for a little while.

ROSAMUND. All right. (*ROSAMUND exits. Slowly, DORA rises and crosses to Dianne.*)

DIANNE. So. The brave little toad has come out of its hole.

DORA. You're insolent, Mam'selle.

DIANNE. I might have guessed. You made no attempt to get the Head.

DORA. It was too late. Somebody would have seen me... It seemed better to stay here until it was over.

DIANNE. Hiding? Oh, the wise little toad.

DORA. Well, why not? The girls were making a disgraceful exhibition of themselves. There was nothing I could do.

DIANNE. You'd better do something now. Help me put some order into this mess. I don't want the servants to notice anything unusual.

DORA. The point is, Mam'selle, what are we going to tell Mrs. Appleyard?

DIANNE. Nothing. (*DIANNE rearranges the drum and some sheet music.*)

DORA. Nothing?

DIANNE. You heard me. Exactly nothing.

DORA. You astound me. If I had my way, they would be whipped.

DIANNE (*with venom*). There is a word in the French language that fits you à merveille, Dora Lumley. Malheureusement, decent people do not use it.

DORA. How dare you speak to me like that! How dare you! I shall inform Mrs. Appleyard myself of these disgraceful goings on. This very night.

DIANNE (*picking up an Indian club from the ground*). You see this? I have the wrists exceptionally strong, Miss Lumley. Un-

less you give me a promise before you leave here that you will not tell one little word of what happened this afternoon, I will hit you with it very hard. And nobody would suspect the French governess. You understand what I say?

DORA. You are not fit to be in authority over innocent young girls.

DIANNE. I agree. I was brought up expecting something much more entertaining. Alors, c'est la vie. You promise? (*DORA contemplates running away. DIANNE starts to twirl the Indian club threateningly.*) I am perfectly serious, Miss Lumley, though I don't intend to give you my reasons.

DORA. I promise. (*An eerie moaning begins. She and DIANNE look around. Sara is still strapped to the board.*)

DIANNE. Mercy on us. What is that strange sound?

DORA. I forgot to untie her...

DIANNE. I wonder who is not fit to be in authority.

(*DIANNE runs to help Sara. Lights crossfade to Minnie and Cook, inside Mrs. Appleyard's study UL, dusting and straightening. DIANNE, DORA and SARA exit. MINNIE talks as she dusts.*)

MINNIE. I think she'll have to close the college down. Things can't go on this way. Can you imagine? And the girls aren't taking to the woman to replace Miss McCraw, rest her soul. I overheard that detective asking Mrs. A. if Miranda, Marion and Miss McCraw might really be working in a brothel somewhere, using their disappearance to make a new life. Have you ever? Tom and I are giving our notice next week and it's none too soon.

COOK (*wipes a chair*). They're saying in the village that ghosts haunt Appleyard College now. Strange lights move in the college ground after dark. (*The front bell rings. MINNIE puts down the dust rag.*)

MINNIE. Now what?

(*COOK continues to straighten the furniture. MINNIE exits, then returns with REG LUMLEY.*)

MINNIE. You can wait here. I'll find Mrs. Appleyard. (*MINNIE exits while COOK picks up the dust rag and smiles at Reg.*)

COOK. Have a chair, I'm sure.

(*REG sits. After a moment, MRS. APPLEYARD enters. COOK exits, nearly running into Mrs. Appleyard. REG stands up as MRS. APPLEYARD crosses to her desk.*)

MRS. APPLEYARD. Good morning, Mr. Lumley, and please have a chair. I wish you had thought to write and tell us you intended calling today. I happen to be extremely busy this afternoon and so is your sister. Put your hat down on that chair if it's worrying you... and your umbrella. (*REG reluctantly sits down and puts his umbrella between his knees.*)

REG. I may say I had no intention of calling today, Ma'am, until I received a telegram from my sister, Dora, late yesterday afternoon. It upset me considerably.

MRS. APPLEYARD. Indeed? May I ask why?

REG. Because it confirmed my own opinion that Appleyard College is no longer a suitable place for my sister to be employed.

MRS. APPLEYARD. I am not concerned with matters of purely personal opinion. Have you any reason for this extraordinary statement?

REG. Yes, I have. A number of reasons. In fact... (*He fumbles with the pocket of his jacket.*) I have a letter here. In case you were not in, you know. Shall I read it to you?

MRS. APPLEYARD. Thank you, no. (*She looks at her watch.*) If you can tell me what you have to say as briefly as possible.

REG. Well, to begin with, it's all this publicity concerning the college. In my opinion, there has been far too much publicity ever since this... er, these... er, unfortunate occurrences at the Hanging Rock.

MRS. APPLEYARD. I don't recall your sister being mentioned at any time in the press.

REG. Well, perhaps not my sister... but you know how people talk. You can't open a paper nowadays without reading something about all this business. It's not right, in my view, that a respectable young woman like Dora should be connected in

any way whatsoever with crime and all that sort of thing. Publicity is hardly ever respectable, unless you are somebody frightfully important, like Lord Kitchener.

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Be careful how you express yourself, Mr. Lumley. Not crime. Mystery, if you like. A very different matter.

REG. All right then, mystery. And I don't like it, Mrs. Applebyard. Neither does my sister.

MRS. APPLEBYARD. My solicitors are confident there will be a solution shortly, whatever you and your friends in... where is it... Warragul... may choose to think. Is that all you have to say?

REG. Only that Dora has told me she wishes to terminate her employment with you as from today, Saturday, March the twenty-first. In point of fact, I have a cab outside waiting to take her away; and if you'll kindly tell her her brother is here, and have her pack her bags, the heavy luggage can be sent later on.

MRS. APPLEBYARD (*furiously*). Your sister is a pink-eyed imbecile, Mr. Lumley. I should have given her notice before Easter, even without your interference. Fortunately, you've saved me the trouble. You understand, of course, that by her extraordinary behavior, she forfeits her salary for such a breach of contract?

REG. I'm not so sure about that, but it can be adjusted later on. And, by the way, I understand she would like a written reference.

MRS. APPLEBYARD. I daresay she would! Although any reference from myself, with a grain of truth in it, would be unlikely to gain her a position. I am a truthful woman, Mr. Lumley, and if you don't know it already, allow me to tell you that your sister is a bad-tempered, ignorant dunce and the sooner she gets out of this house the better. (*She rings her bell.*) If you will kindly wait in the hall, one of the maids will bring your sister and you may tell her to start packing her bag at once. If she hurries, you can catch the Melbourne Express.

REG (*angrily*). But Mrs. Applebyard, I insist on you hearing me out. Surely you want to know my point of view about all this?

I mean there are quite a number of people who... (MRS. AP-
PLEYARD pushes him out of the study.)
MRS. APLEYARD. Get out!

(MINNIE sheepishly enters.)

MINNIE. I wonder if I could have a word with you. It's Miss Sara. Mam'selle asked me to slip up with something, since she's not been eating.

MRS. APLEYARD (bellowing). Well? So?

MINNIE. Just wanting to inform you. I'll fix her up a tray then.

MRS. APLEYARD. Yes, you do that. And kindly tell Miss Sara not to put out her light until she has a word with me.

MINNIE. Yes, Mum.

(Lights crossfade to SARA on a cot, DL, in an isolated spot-light. She lies there, eyes open. DIANNE enters.)

DIANNE. Minnie brought you up a nice boiled egg on my special orders. The jelly and cream she pinched off Madam's dinner tray.

SARA. I won't touch it. Have it taken away.

DIANNE. That's baby talk, Sara. And you're a great girl of thirteen.

SARA. I don't know. Even my guardian doesn't know for certain. Sometimes I feel as if I was a hundred years old.

DIANNE. You won't feel that way when you leave school and all the boys are after you... All you need is a bit of fun.

SARA. Fun. Fun. Come over here. Close to the bed and I'll tell you something nobody at the college knows except Miranda, and she promised never to tell. (DIANNE crosses near cot.) I was brought up in an orphanage. Fun! Sometimes I dream about it even now. When I can't go to sleep. One day I told them I thought it would be fun to be a lady circus rider on a lovely white horse in a spangled dress. The matron was afraid I was going to run away and shaved my head. I bit her in the arm. (She starts crying.)

DIANNE. There. Don't cry. Look, I'll leave the tray here, in case you change your mind. Come on and try a bit of the jelly.

SARA. Never! Not if I was starving. (*DIANNE exits. SARA stares straight ahead. Lights fade to black.*)

SCENE FOUR

SCENE: *A day later. At the Fitzhubert Lodge, UR. MICHAEL and ALBERT share beers in Michael's bedroom.*

ALBERT. The grog keeps the cold out and Cook knocked us up a sandwich. You've been gone so long you probably don't remember what her sandwiches are like, but go on, help yourself.

MICHAEL. If you was a married man, you'd be what the women's magazines call a homemaker.

ALBERT. I like a bit of comfort when I can get it, if that's what you mean.

MICHAEL. Not only that... I'd like to see you in a place of your own someday.

ALBERT. Oh, you would, would you? I'd soon be getting itchy feet, Mike, even if I had the dough to settle down and raise a pack of kids. How are you liking city life with the nobs?

MICHAEL. Not at all. I much prefer it out here. My aunt keeps giving her ghastly parties. I haven't told them I'm going up north in a week or two, probably Queensland.

ALBERT. Now, there's a place I've never really seen.

MICHAEL. Why don't you take a holiday and come up north with me?

ALBERT. Jeez, you mean it?

MICHAEL. Of course I mean it.

ALBERT. Where would you be stopping?

MICHAEL. There's a big cattle station I want to see away up near the border.

ALBERT (*considering*). I reckon I could get a job on one of them big runs. All the same, Mike, I can't walk out on your uncle and the horses unless I got someone to suit him at Lake View. The old geezer's treated me pretty good, taking it all around.

MICHAEL. I understand that. Anyway, start keeping your eyes skinned for the right bloke to take over and I'll write to you as soon as I know my plans... *(Takes a drink.)* When I was a child I always thought whisky was some kind of remedy for toothache. My nanny used to dip cotton wool into the bottle. Lately I find that a stiff whisky's quite a help when I can't sleep.

ALBERT. Still thinking about that bloody Rock?

MICHAEL. I can't help it. It comes back at night. Dreams.

ALBERT. Talk about dreams! I had a bobbydazzler last night. Talk about real.

MICHAEL. Tell me. I'm an expert on nightmares since I came to Australia.

ALBERT. Not exactly a nightmare this wasn't... Oh, hell. I can't explain.

MICHAEL. Go on. Try! Mine are so real sometimes I can't even be sure they are dreams.

ALBERT. I was bloody well dead asleep. Had a big Saturday. Must have been 'round midnight when I got to bed. Well, all of a sudden I'm as wide awake as I am this minute and there's a stink of pansies in the room. I opens my eyes to see where it's coming from. I never knew pansies has that much perfume. Sort of dainty but no mistaking it. Sounds bloody silly, don't it?

MICHAEL. Not to me. Go on.

ALBERT. Well, I opens my eyes and the joint's as bright as day, although it's dark as hell outside. Never struck me as funny until I'm telling you now. *(He lights a cigarette.)* That's right. Like the gas was full on. And there she is, standing at the end of the bed... exactly where you're sitting now.

MICHAEL. Who was? Who was it?

ALBERT. Jeez, Mike! There's no call to get worked up over a bloody dream! My kid sister. You remember, the one I told you about that was nuts on pansies? She seemed to be wearing some kind of nightgown. And that didn't strike me as funny either. Not until now. Otherwise, she looked about the same as when I seen her last... Oh, about six or seven years ago, I suppose. I forget now.

MICHAEL. Did she say anything or just stand there?

ALBERT. Mostly just stand there, looking down at me and smiling. "Don't you know me, Bertie?" she says. And I says, "Of course I know you." "Oh, Bertie!" she says. "Your poor arms with the mermaids and the way you was laying there with your mouth wide open and that broken tooth I would've known you anywhere!" I'm just sitting up to get a better look at her when she starts to sort of... What the hell do you call it when a person starts to go all misty-like?

MICHAEL. Transparent?

ALBERT. That's right. How did you know? I calls out, "Hi, Sis! Don't go yet." But she's almost gone, all but her voice. I could hear it plain as what I'm hearing you now. She says, "Good-bye, Bertie. I've come a long way to see you and now I must go." I said good-bye, but she'd gone. Clean through that wall over there... You reckon I'm batty? *(There's a pause as MICHAEL closes his eyes and then opens them again.)*

MICHAEL. Batty? If you're batty, there's no sense believing in anything... Batty or not, you're my friend, Albert. Think I'll have another drink and turn in. *(He reaches for another beer. ALBERT finds an envelope in his coat pocket. He pulls it out and then puts it back in the pocket.)* Aren't you going to open your letter? Don't mind me. *(ALBERT pulls the letter out again.)*

ALBERT. Tell you the truth, I'm not too clever at making out this kind of fancy writing. Better on the print. How about you reading it to me?

MICHAEL. Good heavens. There might be something private.

ALBERT. Not unless the cops are after me. Fire away.

MICHAEL *(holding the letter)*. It's written from the Galleface Hotel.

ALBERT. Don't know the joint... Where is it?

MICHAEL. At least it seems to be written from there and posted later, from Freemantle.

ALBERT. Cut the frills and tell me what it's about.

MICHAEL. It's a letter from Irma Leopold's father! *(He reads:)*
"I understand you are only a young fellow and unmarried. My wife and I will be most happy if you'll accept the enclosed check as a token of our everlasting gratitude. I understand you are presently employed as a coachman. If you have any

wish to change your present employment at some future date, please do not hesitate to communicate with me at my banker's address, below." It's a check for £1000!

ALBERT. Jeez!

MICHAEL. This is fantastic! What are you going to do?

ALBERT. I don't know. I'll have to sleep on it. *(They pause, looking at each other.)*

MICHAEL. I'll be leaving early in the morning.

ALBERT. I know.

MICHAEL. I'd better turn in. Congratulations!

(MICHAEL and ALBERT shake hands. ALBERT exits. MICHAEL takes a long, last drink of his beer. Lights crossfade UL to Mrs. Appleyard's study at Appleyard College. IRISH TOM sits in a chair, talking, as MINNIE arranges papers on the top of the desk.)

IRISH TOM. The headlines was "Fire in City Hotel. Brother and Sister Burned to Death."

MINNIE. Glory be!

IRISH TOM. Can you imagine. I can see the two of them storming out of here, plain as day, Dora holding her head high, Mrs. A. screaming at the brother. Burned to death.

MINNIE. The night they left here, riding to their deaths... Sure is quiet here on Sunday, everyone at church.

(MRS. APPLEYARD enters, carrying a small basket in her hand. She is surprised to see them.)

MRS. APPLEYARD *(giddily)*. Minnie. Tom. Surely this is your day off.

MINNIE. It don't matter, Ma'am. We're all behind this morning after yesterday. *(IRISH TOM tips his hat.)*

MRS. APPLEYARD. Minnie, is Alice on duty?

MINNIE. No. And Tom's fixing to take Cook into church in a minute. Do you want something? *(MRS. APPLEYARD puts the basket away behind the desk and motions for MINNIE to sit down. IRISH TOM exits.)*

MRS. APLEYARD. You look tired, Minnie. Why don't you go and lie down?

MINNIE. I'll lay my tables, first. Besides, somebody might call.

MRS. APLEYARD. Exactly. I was about to tell you that I'm expecting Mr. Cosgrove sometime this morning. Miss Sara's guardian. I can see him through the window when he arrives and can easily answer the door myself.

MINNIE. Well, Ma'am, it don't seem right.

MRS. APLEYARD. You're a good, reliable girl, Minnie. You'll have five pounds on your wedding day. Now do as I say and leave me. I have some business letters to attend to before Mr. Cosgrove comes.

(MINNIE curtsies and DIANNE enters.)

DIANNE. Excuse me. Might I have a word with you about Sara Waybourne? *(MINNIE exits. MRS. APLEYARD waits a few moments.)*

MRS. APLEYARD. I'd better tell you, Mam'selle. You're wasting my time and your own. Sara Waybourne left here this morning with her guardian.

DIANNE. Oh, no. No. When I saw her yesterday, the poor child was not fit to take a journey. Actually, Madame, it's of Sara's health that I wished to speak.

MRS. APLEYARD. She appeared well enough this morning.

DIANNE. Ah, the pauvre enfant.

MRS. APLEYARD. A troublemaker from the very first.

DIANNE. An orphan.

MRS. APLEYARD. One must make excuses for the lonely ones. In fact, I doubt whether I shall accept her here for another term. However, that can be dealt with later. Mr. Cosgrove was insistent on taking the child with him then and there. It was most inconvenient but I had no choice in the matter.

DIANNE. You surprise me. Mr. Cosgrove is a charming man with the perfect manners. It's so unlike him to...

MRS. APLEYARD. Men, Mam'selle, are often inconsiderate in such things. As you will shortly be finding out for yourself. *(DIANNE rises.)*

DIANNE. Sara's things. I regret that I was not here to help her pack.

MRS. APLEYARD. I helped Sara to put a few things she especially wanted in her little covered basket. Mr. Cosgrove was waiting downstairs, in a hurry to get away... He had a cab or a carriage ordered.

DIANNE. We may have passed them on the way home from church. I wish very much that I'd seen them and waved good-bye.

MRS. APLEYARD. You are sentimental, Mam'selle, unlike most of your race. However, there it is, the child has gone... Is there anything else you wish to say, Mam'selle?

DIANNE. No, Madam.

MRS. APLEYARD. Is that rouge I see on your cheek?

DIANNE. Powder. I find it becoming.

(DIANNE exits. After she does, MRS. APLEYARD pulls the basket out and clutches it to her chest. Lights crossfade to Sara's cot. MINNIE enters with DIANNE. MRS. APLEYARD exits.)

MINNIE. A bit spooky in here, isn't it? *(DIANNE crosses to the cot. She finds a nightgown thrown over the bed.)*

DIANNE. She didn't take much with her. *(MINNIE crosses to the cot.)*

MINNIE. Here's a nightdress case and a sponge bag, with the sponge still in it.

DIANNE. Madam said she only packed a few necessary articles in a small basket for the journey. It's best we put everything away in the wardrobe until Miss Sara returns after Easter.

MINNIE. Shall I put fresh sheets on the bed over there? That was Miss Miranda's. Now there was a lovely girl for you.

DIANNE. No, take all the bed linen away. *(MINNIE strips the sheets off of Sara's cot.)*

MINNIE. Beats me why young Sara didn't go off on Sunday morning in this nice blue coat with the fur collar hanging in her closet. I'll say a kid of thirteen don't have much sense when it comes to clothes.

DIANNE. Was it you that brought Miss Sara her breakfast this morning?

MINNIE. Now that you mention it, Cook asked me to make sure of it. I forgot.

DIANNE. She had a migraine Saturday and had eaten nothing. *(She picks up the picture of MIRANDA on Sara's cot and looks at it.)* She did so love Miranda. She used to carry this picture around in her pocket. *(She puts it down.)* Even to church. Funny she'd forget it today.

(Lights crossfade to the Bumpfer home DR. Outside at a table, CONSTABLE and MRS. BUMPHER are seated and having tea. BUMPHER holds a letter.)

BUMPHER *(reading)*. "The truth is, I fear this unhappy child has mysteriously disappeared. I have asked a few questions, very discreet, of the only two persons home at the time of Monsieur Cosgrove's visit, besides Madame herself, and neither of these persons, Minnie, the femme de chambre and Tom, the handyman, saw Monsieur Cosgrove arrive at the house, nor did they see him leave, with or without the child, Sara." *(He puts down the letter.)* This kind of thing leaves a nasty taste in my mouth. And I'd formed an excellent opinion of the French lady. Not the type of woman to lose her head... You off to tea this afternoon?

MRS. BUMPHER. Since when have I been out to tea? If you'd like to know, I'm going to clean right through the house for Easter.

BUMPHER. I was only asking. Because last time you went to a social you brought home those cream puffs I like - from the Vicarage - and a lot of gossip.

MRS. BUMPHER *(sniffing)*. You know very well I'm not one for gossip... What is it you want to know?

BUMPHER. Shrewd little woman, aren't you? I've been wondering if you ever heard any of your lady friends mention Mrs. Appleyard at the college? In my experience, it's amazing how a housewife knows things that take weeks of police legwork to uncover.

MRS. BUMPER. Let me see. Well, I've heard it said the old girl's a bit of a Tartar when she flies into one of her rages.

BUMPER. Flies into rages, does she?

MRS. BUMPER. I'm only telling you what I hear. Smooth as silk to me, if I happen to run into her in the village.

BUMPER (*sipping tea*). You know anyone who's actually seen her in a rage?

MRS. BUMPER. Drink up while I think a minute... Once the Comptons had a row with her over a pound's difference on the price of their jams. Mrs. Compton said the old girl was so mad she thought she was going to have a stroke over it.

BUMPER. Anything else?

MRS. BUMPER. The chambermaid says she drinks a bit. But you know how people talk. Especially since the college mystery.

BUMPER. Don't I just... Well, thanks for the tea. I'll be off now. Expect me when you see me this evening. I may be home very late.

MRS. BUMPER. I know better than to ask why.

(Lights crossfade to Mrs. Appleyard's study, UL, where MRS. APPLEYARD sits completely dressed up in traveling clothes. She drinks brandy from her snifter. MR. and MRS. BUMPER exit. IRISH TOM enters the study.)

MRS. APPLEYARD (*with urgency*). Yes?

IRISH TOM (*upset*). I... we... found the body... (*His knees shake so much that he sits down.*) Lying in the flowers near the greenhouse. Wearing her little nightgown... I'd say she's been dead for a couple of days.

MRS. APPLEYARD. Well... Please talk very slowly... Who was it?

IRISH TOM. Sara Waybourne.

MRS. APPLEYARD. Are you sure the girl is quite dead?

IRISH TOM. Yes, quite sure. (*MRS. APPLEYARD lets out a little scream and then smothers it quickly by drinking brandy. She then holds up the brandy bottle and offers one to IRISH TOM.*)

MRS. APPLEYARD. Would you like one?

IRISH TOM. No, thank you... Should I fetch Minnie? She's the only other person here right now and...

MRS. APPLEBYARD. No, you fool. Can you drive a horse?

IRISH TOM. I'm not much of a hand but I can try with a pony...

MRS. APPLEBYARD (*snappishly*). Good, then you can take me to the police station. For God's sake hurry, and if you see anyone, don't open your mouth.

IRISH TOM. Will you be wanting me to stay at the station with you or shall I get Minnie?

MRS. APPLEBYARD (*rising*). You can let me out just before the station. And then you can come straight back here. There will be plenty of questions for you to answer later.

(Lights crossfade to C where the Rock is visible. IRISH TOM exits. MRS. APPLEBYARD crosses to the Rock and stares at it, from the base of the picnic grounds. As she stares, she shakes her fist at it. She looks at the cameo on her chest, opens it and looks at the picture.)

MRS. APPLEBYARD. Oh, Arthur, if you'd been here, then none of this would ever have happened...

(Insect noises are heard. MRS. APPLEBYARD looks up, with renewed anger and passion, and starts to climb up the rocks, to the platform. When she gets to the spot where the girls disappeared, she hikes up her skirt and sits against one of the boulders. Insect noises grow louder. Suddenly, through backlighting on a scrim, the silhouette of SARA appears, in a nightdress, with blood on her face. MRS. APPLEBYARD screams. Lights go to black on the platform. The sounds of the insects remain. Lights crossfade slowly to DC. BUMPHER, MCKENZIE and IRISH TOM stand watching the Rock.)

BUMPHER. The neighbors saw her walking through the road in her best dress, with her purse. Thought she looked quite a sight. Say she just started running towards the rock.

MCKENZIE. It looks like she fell two hundred feet or more.

IRISH TOM. Bloody awful.

BUMPHER. I hope this is the end of the college mystery, once and for all.

(ALBERT enters, carrying a bag.)

ALBERT. Hello, Constable. Doctor McKenzie and Tom... *(He tips his hat.)* I hear there's more trouble. I tell you. Taking me reward money and clearing out of here.

BUMPHER. Where you off to?

ALBERT. Going north with Michael, to look around a cattle ranch. After that, who knows...

IRISH TOM. Good luck to you. Minnie and me are leaving tomorrow.

McKENZIE *(to Bumpher)*. At this rate, we'll be among the few still here.

ALBERT. Came by for a final look.

BUMPHER. People just can't seem to stay away from this old Rock, can they? Best of luck to you, Crundall... *(Tips his hat. McKENZIE, BUMPHER and IRISH TOM exit. The lights shift subtly, leaving ALBERT in an area by himself, watching the Rock. He pauses to look.)*

ALBERT. Spectacular, you are. With your hot craters. Your crags, sharp as knives. Your bottomless holes. Your caves dark as hell. Sucking life right up. We'll never know what's up there, they say. *(He starts to shout.)* But I want to know, are you the devil or aren't you? *(There is silence while Albert waits, his cry echoing through the rocks. Half-expecting an answer, he quiets.)* There's that sweet smell. *(He turns and looks at the ground.)* Pansies... Funny. Like my sister. I'd climb it again if I knew she'd be waiting... But it's time to move on from this place. You feel it when it's time to move on. And you know you'd better do it while you can, before it's too late... *(Softly.)* Good-bye, Sara.

(After a moment, ALBERT exits. The lights shift to half, and figures appear on the Rock, in shadow, in various poses: MIRANDA, MARION, MISS McCRAW, MRS. APPLEYARD and SARA. They freeze in a ghostly tableaux. BLACKOUT - END OF PLAY)