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How is midweek
or perspective
captured
through landscape?

Everyone agreed that the day was just right for the picnic to Hanging Rock – a shimmering summer morning warm and still, with cicadas shrilling all through breakfast from the loquat trees outside the dining-room windows and bees murmuring above the pansies bordering the drive. Heavy-headed dahlias flamed and drooped in the immaculate flowerbeds, the well-trimmed lawns steamed under the mounting sun. Already the gardener was watering the hydrangeas still shaded by the kitchen wing at the rear of the College. The boarders at Mrs Appleyard's College for Young Ladies had been up and scanning the bright unclouded sky since six o'clock and were now fluttering about in their holiday muslins like a flock of excited butterflies. Not only was it a Saturday and the long awaited occasion of the annual picnic, but Saint Valentine's Day, traditionally celebrated on the fourteenth of February by

the interchange of elaborate cards and favours. All were madly romantic and strictly anonymous – supposedly the silent tributes of lovesick admirers; although Mr Whitehead the elderly English gardener and Tom the Irish groom were almost the only two males to be so much as smiled at during the term.

The Headmistress was probably the only person at the College who received no cards. It was well known that Mrs Appleyard disapproved of Saint Valentine and his ridiculous greetings that cluttered up the College mantelpieces right up to Easter and gave as much extra dusting to the maids as the annual prize-giving. And such mantelpieces! Two in the long drawing-room of white marble, supported by pairs of caryatids as firm of bust as Madam herself; others of carved and tortured wood embellished with a thousand winking tiddling mirrors. Appleyard College was already, in the year nineteen hundred, an architectural anachronism in the Australian bush – a hopeless misfit in time and place. The clumsy two storey mansion was one of those elaborate houses that sprang up all over Australia like exotic fungi following the finding of gold. Why this particular stretch of flat sparsely wooded country, a few miles out of the village of Macedon crouching at the foot of the mount, had been selected as a suitable building site, nobody will ever know. The insignificant creek that meandered in a series of shallow pools down the slope at the rear of the ten acre property offered little inducement as a setting for an Italianate mansion; nor the occasional glimpses, through a screen of stringy-barked eucalyptus, of the misty summit of Mount Macedon rising

up to the east on the opposite side of the road. However, built it was, and of solid Castlemaine stone, to withstand the ravages of time. The original owner, whose name is long ago forgotten, had only lived in it for a year or two before the huge ugly house was standing empty and up for sale.

The spacious grounds, comprising vegetable and flower gardens, pig and poultry pens, orchard and tennis lawns, were in wonderful order, thanks to Mr Whitehead the English gardener, still in charge. There were several vehicles in the handsome stone stables, all in excellent repair. The hideous Victorian furnishings were as good as new, with marble mantelpieces direct from Italy and thick piled carpets from Axminster. The oil lamps on the cedar staircase were held aloft by classical statues, there was a grand piano in the long drawing-room and even a square tower, reached by a narrow circular staircase, from which the Union Jack could be hoisted on Queen Victoria's birthday. To Mrs Appleyard, newly arrived from England with a considerable nest-egg and letters of introduction to some of the leading Australian families, the mansion, standing well back from the Bendigo Road behind a low stone wall, was immediately impressive. The brown pebble eyes ever on the alert for a bargain summed up the amazing place as ideal for a select and suitably expensive boarding school – better still a College – for Young Ladies. To the delight of the Bendigo house agent who was showing her over the property she had bought it then and there, lock, stock and barrel, including the gardener, with a reduction for cash down, and moved in.

Whether the Headmistress of Appleyard College (as the local white elephant was at once re-christened in gold lettering on a handsome board at the big iron gates) had any previous experience in the educational field, was never divulged. It was unnecessary. With her high-piled greying pompadour and ample bosom, as rigidly controlled and disciplined as her private ambitions, the cameo portrait of her late husband flat on her respectable chest, the stately stranger looked precisely what the parents expected of an English Headmistress. And as looking the part is well known to be more than half the battle in any form of business enterprise from Punch and Judy to floating a loan on the Stock Exchange, the College, from the very first day, was a success; and by the end of the first year, showing a gratifying profit. All this was nearly six years before this chronicle begins.

Saint Valentine is impartial in his favours, and not only the young and beautiful were kept busy opening their cards this morning. Miranda as usual had a drawer of her wardrobe filled with lace-trimmed pledges of affection, although Baby Jonnie's home-grown cupid and row of pencilled kisses, addressed from Queensland in her father's large loving hand, held pride of place on the marble mantelpiece. Edith Horton, plain as a frog, had smugly accounted for at least eleven, and even little Miss Lumley had produced at the breakfast table a card with a bilious looking dove bearing the inscription I ADORE THEE EVER. A statement presumably coming from the drab unspeakable brother who had called on his sister last term. Who else, reasoned the budding girls, would adore the myopic junior

governess, eternally garbed in brown serge and flat-heeled shoes?

'He is fond of her,' said Miranda, ever charitable. 'I saw them kissing goodbye at the hall door.'

'But darling Miranda - Reg Lumley is such a dreary creature!' laughed Irma, characteristically shaking out blue-black curls and idly wondering why the school straw hat was so unbecoming. Radiantly lovely at seventeen, the little heiress was without personal vanity or pride of possession. She loved people and things to be beautiful, and pinned a bunch of wildflowers into her coat with as much pleasure as a breathtaking diamond brooch. Sometimes just to look at Miranda's calm oval face and straight corn-yellow hair gave her a sharp little stab of pleasure. Darling Miranda now gazing dreamily out at the sunlit garden. 'What a wonderful day! I can hardly wait to get out into the country!'

'Listen to her, girls! Anyone would think that Appleyard College was in the Melbourne slums!'

'Forests,' said Miranda, 'with ferns and birds... like we have at home.'

'And spiders,' Marion said. 'I only wish someone had sent me a map of the Hanging Rock for a Valentine, I could have taken it to the picnic.' Irma was forever being struck by the extraordinary notions of Marion Quade and now wanted to know whoever wanted to look at maps at a picnic?

'I do,' Marion truthfully said. 'I always like to know exactly where I am.' Reputed to have mastered Long Division in the cradle, Marion Quade had spent the greater part of her seventeen years in the relentless pursuit of

Marion's intelligence is viewed
as foreign.

✓ knowledge. Small wonder that with her thin intelligent features, sensitive nose that appeared to be always on the scent of something long awaited and sought, and thin swift legs, she had come to resemble a greyhound.

✓ The girls began discussing their Valentines. 'Somebody had the nerve to send Miss McCraw a card on squared paper, covered with little sums,' said Rosamund. Actually this card had been the inspired gesture of Irish Tom, egged on by Minnie the housemaid, for a lark. The forty-five-year-old purveyor of higher mathematics to the senior girls had received it with dry approval, figures in the eyes of Greta McCraw being a good deal more acceptable than roses and forget-me-nots. The very sight of a sheet of paper dotted over with numerals gave her a secret joy; a sense of power, knowing how with a stroke or two of a pencil they could be sorted out, divided, multiplied, re-arranged to miraculous new conclusions. Tom's Valentine, though he never knew it, was a success. His choice for Minnie was a bleeding heart embedded in roses and obviously in the last stages of a fatal disease. Minnie was enchanted, as was Mademoiselle with an old French print of a solitary rose. Thus Saint Valentine reminded the inmates of Appleyard College of the colour and variety of love.

✓ Mademoiselle de Poitiers, who taught dancing and French conversation and attended to the boarders' wardrobes, was bustling about in a fever of delighted anticipation. Like her charges she wore a simple muslin dress in which she contrived to look elegant by the addition of a wide ribbon belt and shady straw hat. Only a few years older than some of the senior boarders, she was equally enchanted

also landscape

at the prospect of escaping from the suffocating routine of the College for a whole long summer day, and ran here and there amongst the girls assembling for a final roll call on the front verandah.

✓ 'Depêchez-vous, mes enfants, dépêchez-vous. Tais-toi, Irma,' chirped the light canary voice of Mademoiselle, for whom la petite Irma could do no wrong. The girl's voluptuous little breasts, her dimples, full red lips, naughty black eyes and glossy black ringlets, were a continual source of aesthetic pleasure. Sometimes in the dingy schoolroom the Frenchwoman, brought up amongst the great European galleries, would look up from her desk and see her against a background of cherries and pineapples, cherubs and golden flagons, surrounded by elegant young men in velvets and satins... 'Tais-toi, Irma... Miss McCraw vient d'arriver.' A gaunt female figure in a puce-coloured pelisse was emerging from the outdoor 'dunnie', an earth-closet reached by a secluded path edged with begonias. The governess walked at her usual measured pace, uninhibited as Royalty, ✓ and with an almost royal dignity. Nobody had ever seen her in a hurry, or without her steel rimmed spectacles. ✓

Greta McCraw had undertaken to take on picnic duty today, assisted by Mademoiselle, purely as a matter of conscience. A brilliant mathematician – far too brilliant for her poorly paid job at the College – she would have given a five pound note to have spent this precious holiday, no matter how fine, shut up in her room with that fascinating new treatise on the Calculus. A tall woman with dry ochre skin and coarse greying hair perched like an untidy bird's nest on top of her head, she had remained oblivious to

female also

the vagaries of the Australian scene despite a residence of thirty years. Climate meant nothing, nor fashion, nor the never ending miles of gum trees and dry yellow grass, of which she was hardly more aware than of the mists and mountains of her native Scotland, as a girl. The boarders, used to her outlandish wardrobe, were no longer amused, and her choice for today's picnic went without comment – the well known church-going toque and black laced boots, together with the puce-coloured pelisse, in which her bony frame took on the proportions of one of her own Euclidian triangles, and a pair of rather shabby puce kid gloves.

Mademoiselle, on the other hand, as an admired arbiter of fashion, was minutely examined and passed with honours, down to the turquoise ring and white silk gloves. 'Although,' said Blanche, 'I'm surprised at her letting Edith go out in those larky blue ribbons. Whatever is Edith looking at over there?' A pasty-faced fourteen-year-old with the contours of an overstuffed bolster was standing a few feet away, staring up at the window of a room on the first floor. Miranda tossed back her straight corn-coloured hair, smiling and waving at a pale little pointed face looking dejectedly down at the animated scene below. 'It's not fair,' said Irma, waving and smiling too, 'after all the child is only thirteen. I never thought Mrs A. would be so mean.'

Miranda sighed: 'Poor little Sara – she wanted so much to go to the picnic.'

Failure to recite 'The Wreck of the Hesperus' yesterday had condemned the child Sara Waybourne to solitary confinement upstairs. Later, she would pass the sweet summer afternoon in the empty schoolroom, committing

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the hated masterpiece to memory. The College was already, despite its brief existence, quite famed for its discipline, deportment and mastery of English literature.

Now an immense purposeful figure was swimming and billowing in grey silk taffeta on to the tiled and colonnaded verandah, like a galleon in full sail. On the gently heaving bosom, a cameo portrait of a gentleman in side whiskers, framed in garnets and gold, rose and fell in tune with the pumping of the powerful lungs encased in a fortress of steel busks and stiff grey calico. 'Good morning, girls,' boomed the gracious plummy voice, specially imported from Kensington.

'Good morning, Mrs Appleyard,' chorused the curt-sewing half-circle drawn up before the hall door.

'Are we all present, Mademoiselle? 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, even on the lower slopes. It is, however, a geological marvel on which you will be required to write a brief essay on Monday morning. I also wish to remind you that the vicinity is renowned for its venomous snakes and poisonous ants of various species. 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.'

The covered drag from Hussey's Livery stables at Lower Macedon, drawn by five splendid bay horses, was already drawn up at the College gates with Mr Hussey on the box. Mr Hussey had personally driven 'The College' on all important occasions ever since the grand opening day when the parents had come up by train from Melbourne to drink champagne on the lawns. With his kindly shrewd blue eyes and cheeks perpetually blooming like the Mount Macedon rose gardens, he was a prime favourite with everyone in the district; even Mrs Appleyard called him her 'good man' and enjoyed graciously inviting him into her study for a glass of sherry . . .

'Steady there Sailor . . . Woa Duchess . . . Belmonte, I'll give you such a lathering . . .' The five well-trained horses were actually standing like statues, but it was all part of the fun; Mr Hussey like all good coachmen having a nice sense of style and timing. 'Mind your gloves on the wheel Miss McCraw, it's dusty . . .' He had long ago given up attempting to teach this basic truth to lady passengers about to enter one of his cabs. At last everyone was seated to the satisfaction of special friends and enemies and the two governesses. The three senior girls, Miranda, Irma and Marion Quade, inseparable companions, were allotted the coveted box seat in front beside the driver, an arrangement with which Mr Hussey was well pleased. Nice high-spirited girls, all three of 'em. . .

'Thank you Mr Hussey - you may go now,' Miss McGraw ordered somewhere from the rear, suddenly aware of non-mathematical responsibilities and in full command.

They were off; the College already out of sight except for the tower through the trees as they bowled along the level Melbourne-Bendigo road, vibrating with particles of fine red dust. 'Get up Sailor, you lazy brute . . . Prince, Belmonte, get back in your collars . . .' For the first mile or two the scenery was familiar through the daily perambulation of the College crocodile. The passengers knew only too well, without bothering to look out, how the scraggy stringy bark forest lined the road on either side, now and then opening out onto a lighter patch of cleared land. The Comptons' whitewashed cottage whose sprawling quince trees supplied the College with jellies and jams, the clump of wayside willows at which the governess in charge would invariably call a halt and head for home. It was the same in Longman's *Highroads of History*, where the class were forever turning back for recapitulation at the death of King George the Fourth before starting off again with Edward the Third next term . . . Now the willows in rich summer green were gaily passed and a sense of adventure ahead took over as heads began to peer through the buttoned tarpaulin flaps of the drag. The road took a slight turn, there was a fresher green amongst the dun coloured foliage and now and then a stand of blue-black pines, a glimpse of Mount Macedon tufted as usual with fluffy white clouds above the southern slopes, where the romantic summer villas hinted at far off adult delights.

At Appleyard College SILENCE WAS GOLDEN, written up in the corridors and often imposed. There was a delicious freedom about the swift steady motion of the drag and even in the warm dusty air blowing up in their

conferred and Mr Hussey was requested to let down the steps of the drag at a suitable spot off the road. In the shade of an old white gum the zinc-lined wicker basket that kept the milk and lemonade deliciously cool was taken out and unpacked, hats were removed without further comment and biscuits handed round.

'It's a long time since I tasted this stuff,' said Mr Hussey sipping at his lemonade. 'I don't take any hard liquor though, when I've got a big day on my hands like this.'

Miranda had risen to her feet, a mug of lemonade raised high above her head. 'To Saint Valentine!' 'Saint Valentine!' Everyone including Mr Hussey raised their mugs and sent the lovely name ringing down the dusty road. Even Greta McCraw, who wouldn't have cared if they were drinking to Tom of Bedlam or the Shah of Persia and was listening exclusively to the Music of the Spheres in her own head, absently raised an empty mug to her pale lips. 'And now,' said Mr Hussey, 'if your saint has no objections, Miss Miranda, I think we had better be on our way.'

Just a 'Humans,' Miss McCraw confided to a magpie picking up crumbs of shortbread at her feet, 'are obsessed with the notion of perfectly useless movement. Nobody but an idiot ever seems to want to sit still for a change!' And she climbed reluctantly back into her seat.

The basket was re-packed, the passengers counted in case anyone should be left behind, the steps of the drag pulled up under the floorboards and once again they were on the road, moving through the scattered silvery shade of straight young trees, where the horses pressed forward through ripples of golden light that broke on straining

notion of time & place
shoulders and dark sweating rumps. The five sets of hooves were almost soundless on the soft unmade surface of the country road. No traveller passed by, no bird song splintered the sunflecked silence, the grey pointed leaves of the saplings hung lifeless in the noonday heat. The laughing chattering girls in the warm shadowed vehicle unconsciously fell silent until they were out again in full sunlight. 'It must be nearly twelve o'clock,' Mr Hussey told his passengers, looking not at his watch but at the sun. 'We haven't done too badly so far, ladies . . . I swore black and blue to your boss I'd have you back at the College by eight o'clock.' The word 'College' sent a chill into the warmth of the drag and nobody answered.

For once Greta McCraw must have been attending to general conversation, which she seldom did in the teachers' sitting-room. 'There is no reason why we should be late, 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?' The driver nodded in rather dazed agreement. Miss McCraw was a queer fish all right. '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.'

This was really too much for Mr Hussey's practical intelligence. 'I don't know about a hippopotamus, ma'am, but if you're thinking of the Camel's Hump,' he pointed with his whip to the Macedon ranges, where the Hump

stood out against the sky, 'it's a blooming sight longer road than the one we came by, arithmetic or not. 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.'

'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 Quade, the only member of the class to take Pythagoras in her stride, was a favourite pupil, in the sense that a savage who understands a few words of the language of a shipwrecked sailor is a favourite savage.

While they were talking the angle of vision had gradually altered to bring the Hanging Rock into sudden startling view. Directly ahead, the grey volcanic mass rose up slabbed and pinnacled like a fortress from the empty yellow plain. The three girls on the box seat could see the vertical lines of the rocky walls, now and then gashed with indigo shade, patches of grey green dogwood, outcrops of boulders even at this distance immense and formidable. At the summit, apparently bare of living vegetation, a jagged line of rock cut across the serene blue of the sky. The driver was casually flicking at the amazing thing with his long handled whip. 'There she is ladies . . . only about a mile and a half to go!'

Mr Hussey was full of comfortable facts and figures. 'Over five hundred feet in height . . . volcanic . . . several monoliths . . . thousands of years old. Pardon me, Miss McCraw, I should say millions.'

'The mountain comes to Mahomed. The Hanging Rock comes to Mr Hussey.' The very peculiar governess

was smiling up at him: a secret crooked smile that seemed to Mr Hussey to have even less sense than the words. Made-moiselle, catching his eye, only just stopped herself from winking at the dear bewildered man. Really, poor Greta was getting more eccentric every day!

The drag turned sharply to the right, the pace quickened and the voice of practical sanity boomed from the box seat. '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.' The girls were all chattering again and Edith was not the only one with thoughts centred on chicken pie. Heads craned out between the flaps for another sight of the Rock, appearing and disappearing with every turn of the road; sometimes close enough for the three girls in front to make out the two great balancing boulders near the summit, sometimes almost obscured by the foreground of scrub and tall forest trees.

The so-called Picnic Grounds at the base of the Hanging Rock were entered through a sagging wooden gate, now closed. Miranda, an experienced gate opener on the family property at home, had climbed down unasked from the box seat and was expertly manipulating the warped wooden latch under the admiring eye of Mr Hussey, who noted the sure touch of the slender hands, the dragging weight of the gate neatly supported on one hip. As soon as it was opened wide enough on its rusty hinges to allow the safe passage of the drag, a flock of parrots flew out screeching from an overhanging tree, winging away across the sunlit grassy flats towards Mount Macedon, rising up all blue and green to the south.

‘Come up Sailor . . . Duchess, get over you . . . Belmonte, what d’you think you’re doing . . .? Cripes Miss Miranda, you’d think they’d never set eyes on a blooming parrot before.’ So Mr Hussey, in the best of holiday tempers, guided the five bay horses out of the known dependable present and into the unknown future, with the same happy confidence with which he daily negotiated the narrow gates of the Macedon Livery Stables and his own backyard.

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Manmade improvements on Nature at the Picnic Ground consisted of several circles of flat stones to serve as fireplace and a wooden privy in the shape of a Japanese pagoda. The creek at the close of summer ran sluggishly through long dry grass, now and then almost disappearing to reappear as a shallow pool. Lunch had been set out on large white tablecloths close by, shaded from the heat of the sun by two or three spreading gums. In addition to the chicken pie, angel cake, jellies and the tepid bananas inseparable from an Australian picnic, Cook had provided a handsome ice cake in the shape of a heart, for which Tom had obligingly cut a mould from a piece of tin. Mr Hussey had boiled up two immense billycans of tea on a fire of bark and leaves and was now enjoying a pipe in the shadow of the draught where he could keep a watchful eye on his horses tethered in the shade.

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faces that set the passengers chirping and chattering like budgerigars.

On the box seat, the three senior girls perched beside Mr Hussey were talking in blissful inconsequence of dreams, embroidery, warts, fireworks, the coming Easter Vacation. Mr Hussey, who spent a large part of his working day in listening to miscellaneous conversation, kept his eyes on the road ahead and said nothing.

'Mr Hussey,' said Miranda, 'did you know today is Saint Valentine's Day?'

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

'Mam'selle says he's the Patron Saint of Lovers,' Irma explained. 'He's a darling – sends people gorgeous cards with tinsel and real lace – have a caramel?'

'Not while I'm driving, thanks all the same.' At last Mr Hussey had a conversational innings. He had been to the Races last Saturday and seen a horse belonging to Irma's father come in first. 'What was the name of the horse and the distance?' Marion Quade wanted to know. She wasn't specially interested in horses but liked to store up snippets of useful information, like her late Father, an eminent Q.C.

Edith Horton, hating to be left out of anything and anxious to show off her ribbons, now leaned forward over Miranda's shoulder to ask why Mr Hussey called his big brown horse Duchess? Mr Hussey, who had his favourites amongst the passengers, was uncommunicative. 'Comes to that, Miss, why are *you* called Edith?'

'Because Edith is my Grandmother's name,' she said primly. 'Only horses don't have grandmothers like we do.'

'Oh don't they just!' Mr Hussey turned his square shoulders away from the silly child.

The morning grew steadily hotter. The sun bore down on the shiny black roof of the drag, now covered with fine red dust that seeped through the loosely buttoned curtains into eyes and hair. 'And this we do for pleasure,' Greta McCraw muttered from the shadows, 'so that we may shortly be at the mercy of venomous snakes and poisonous ants . . . how foolish can human creatures be!' Useless, too, to open the book in her satchel with all this schoolgirl chatter in one's ears.

The road to Hanging Rock turns sharply away to the right a little way out of the township of Woodend. Here Mr Hussey pulled up outside the leading hotel to rest and water his horses before starting on the last lap of the drive. Already the heat inside the vehicle was oppressive and there was a wholesale peeling off of the obligatory gloves. 'Can't we take our hats off too, Mam'selle?' asked Irma whose ink-black curls were flowing out in a warm tide under the brim of her stiff school sailor. Mademoiselle smiled and looked across at Miss McCraw, sitting opposite, awake and vertical, but with closed eyes, two puce kid hands locked together on her lap. 'Certainly not. Because we are on an excursion, there is no necessity to look like a wagon load of gypsies.' And re-entered the world of pure uncluttered reason.

The rhythmic beat of the horses' hooves combined with the close air of the drag was making them drowsy. As it was still only eleven o'clock, with plenty of time in which to reach the picnic grounds for lunch, the governesses