

...on a date suitable to
mending Tom from the College as
the horses and ending up, You was
me. I appreciate same and if you
le before the Spring is hanging on
r kep dry this damp wether your
all.
like, was dashed off at breakneck
wn to the winds. Good old Mike
ith a bloody pen. Dear Mike. By
ydazzler all rite. The rest is of no
haps the last sentence: Well Mike
in the City do you know the Post
et? We could have a beer and fix
wrote to your Unkle re turning
d all in order there so you name

In the morning of Sunday the twenty-second of March, Appleyard College presented the usual scene of bustling preparation as the boarders arrayed themselves for church-going in Woodend. Deliberately cut off nowadays from unnecessary contacts with the outside world, the household had remained ignorant throughout the long boring Sunday of the shocking news that would have set every tongue in the place wagging, rules or no rules. There were no Sunday newspapers and dinner was consumed while the charred timbers of the Lumleys' hotel lay smouldering in pale autumn sunshine. Constable Bumper had actually taken Sunday off for a day's fishing at Kynetton, gleefully returning at midnight with a solitary blackfish to be grilled for Monday morning's breakfast: a meal cruelly interrupted by the arrival of young Jim with requests for information from the Melbourne papers, the dramatic death of the

obscure little governess immediately linked up with the almost defunct College Mystery in the journalist mind.

The staff at the College was shorthanded that Sunday and Mademoiselle and Miss Buck had both been called into action. Although it was Minnie's day off, the place was all anyhow with Miss Lumley clearing out like that yesterday afternoon and the good-natured housemaid had remained on duty. Rubbing up the table silver in the pantry she saw, through the narrow window, the two governesses marshalling the gloved and hatted girls into the waiting wagonettes, and presently Tom with Alice and Cook in the buggy. Minnie had just come through the baize door leading into the hall when to her surprise she saw the Headmistress almost running downstairs carrying what looked like a small basket in one hand. At sight of the housemaid she stopped, hanging on to the stair rail, Minnie thought, as if she were feeling giddy, and beckoned her over. 'Minnie! Surely this is your Sunday off?'

'It don't matter, Ma'am,' Minnie said. 'We're all behind this morning - after yesterday.'

'Come into the study for a moment. Is Alice on duty?'

'No Ma'am, Tom took her and Cook into church in the buggy. Did you want her for anything?'

'On the contrary. You look tired, Minnie. Why don't you go and lie down?' (And there was poor Tom with not a tooth in his head since Thursday and never a word of sympathy.)

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

'Exactly. I was about to tell you that I am expecting Mr Cosgrove some time this morning. Miss Sara's guardian.

I can see him through the window when he arrives and can easily answer the door myself.'

'Well, Ma'am, it don't seem right,' Minnie said wavering, as a delicious little shoot of pain ran through her stomach.

'You're a good reliable girl, Minnie. You shall 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.'

'And Laws, Tom,' said Minnie that night, 'the old girl looked something awful, white as chalk and breathing like a steam engine. Five pound? You could have knocked me down with a feather.'

'Glory be - wonders will never cease,' Tom said, putting his arm round her waist with a smacking kiss. He was right. They never will.

As soon as Mademoiselle had returned from church and removed her hat and veil she applied a soupçon of colourless face powder and lipsalve and presented herself at the study door. It was then nearly one o'clock. As usual nowadays it was locked. 'Come in, Mam'selle. What is it?'

'Might I have a few words with you, Madame, before déjeuner? A propos de Sara Waybourne?' Although the governess was aware that Sara was anything but a favourite with the Head, she was unprepared for the expression that creased the older woman's face like an evil wind. 'What about Sara Waybourne?' The pebble eyes were alert, watchful - almost, Dianne decided afterwards, as if she were afraid of what I was going to say.

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

The governess let fly an irrepressible, 'Oh, no! No! When I saw her yesterday the poor child was not fit to take a journey. Actually, Madame, it is of Sara's health that I wished to speak.'

'She appeared well enough this morning.'

'Ah, the pauvre enfant . . .'

The Head eyed her sharply. 'A trouble maker. From the very first.'

'An orphan,' Mademoiselle said boldly. 'One must for those lonely ones make the excuses.'

'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 there and then. It was most inconvenient but I had no choice in the matter.'

'You surprise me,' Mademoiselle said. 'Mr Cosgrove is a charming man with the perfect manners.'

'Men, Mam'selle, are often inconsiderate in such things. As you will shortly be finding out for yourself.' The thin humourless laugh belied the unchanging watchful eyes.

'Sara's things,' Dianne said, rising. 'I regret that I was not here to help her pack.'

'I myself helped Sara to put a few things she specially 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.'

'We may have passed them on the way home from church. I wish very much that I had seen them and waved goodbye.'

'You are sentimental, Mam'selle – unlike most of your race. However, there it is – the child has gone.' Still the governess lingered at the door. She was no longer afraid of the woman whose crackling Sunday taffeta disguised an ageing body in aching need of rest, hot water bottles, the small feminine humanities. ✓

'Is there anything else you wish to say, Mam'selle?' Recalling an elegant little grandmother reclining for two hours every afternoon on a chaise longue, Dianne, greatly daring, enquired if Madame would perhaps consider asking the good Doctor McKenzie for a little something for herself? There had been much fatigue . . . the early autumn . . .

'Thank you . . . No. I have always been an indifferent sleeper. What time is it? I forgot to wind my clock last night.'

'Ten minutes to one, Madame.'

'I shall not be coming in to luncheon. Kindly tell them not to lay a place for me.'

'Nor for Sara,' Mademoiselle unaccountably said.

'Nor for Sara. Is that rouge I see on your cheek, Mam'selle?'

'Powder, Mrs Appleyard. I find it becoming.'

As soon as the impertinent hussy had left the room the Headmistress rose and bent over the cupboard behind the desk. Her hand was trembling so badly she could hardly open the little door. She kicked at it savagely with the rounded toe of her black kid slipper. It flew open and a small covered basket fell out on to the floor. ??

The Headmistress remained in her private rooms for the rest of the day and retired early to bed. On the following morning it was Irish Tom's melancholy pleasure – there being certain warmhearted persons who find some consolation in being first with the worst – to deliver to Mrs Appleyard in person the newspapers filled with lurid accounts of the Lumley tragedy. Somewhat to Tom's disappointment the news had been received at Headquarters in stony silence with a peremptory 'Hand it to me!' Whereas in the kitchen regions there had been a dramatic throwing of aprons over horrified heads and shrill incredulous cries that such a thing could happen only two days after Miss Lumley and her brother had been actually here in this very house: which somehow underlined and intensified the dreadful thing and made the flames nearer and more real.

Tuesday passed without incident. Rosamund had arranged for a joint telegram of farewell to be sent to Irma during the afternoon, when the Leopolds sailed for London accompanied by a ladies' maid, secretary, groom and half a dozen polo ponies. With the relaxing of Dora Lumley's petty disciplines there was a welcome sense of freedom, the ghostly presence of the little figure in brown serge obliterated, at least for the boarders, by excited preparations for Wednesday's wholesale exodus for the Easter holidays. It was a long time since so much whispering and comparing of notes and even occasional laughter had been heard at Appleyard College. To add to an atmosphere of wellbeing a few days of Indian summer were brightening the garden and Mr Whitehead was obliged to turn the sprinklers on to the hydrangea bed where the heavy blue

and purple heads were still blooming under the windows in the west wing. The newspaper forecasts predicted a fine mild Easter gradually working up to a change on Easter Monday.

The two brides-to-be compared notes on their respective trousseaux and Dianne, joyously indiscreet, confided to the goggle-eyed housemaid the story of the emerald bracelet. 'I have no other jewels,' the governess told her. 'Ours will be a very simple wedding. We have very little money and no relations except those in France.' Minnie giggled. 'My Auntie's giving us our wedding reception and Tom reckons she's asked that many relations on both sides there won't be room for the bride and bridegroom to get into the church.'

Miss Buck having proved herself during her brief term of office useless for anything but the imparting of rudimentary Euclid and arithmetic, Mademoiselle found herself occupied most of the day in all manner of small domesticities. Everyone – even Cook and Mr Whitehead – turned to the French governess for orders.

During the morning she had run upstairs for a packet of pins when Alice the under-housemaid appeared on the landing armed with a bucket and brooms. 'Minnie says for me to do out the big double room but there's that many clothes and things lying about I don't know where to begin.'

'I'll help you,' Mademoiselle said. 'Australian school-girls are very untidy I find – I have had much practice of late in packing and folding their dresses.'

'Miss Irma was the one!' Alice said admiringly. 'Gee! Gold-backed brushes all amongst her shoes, and brooches

pinned in her petticoats. If it had been Miss Sara, the Madam would have been on to her like a ton of bricks! That's what it is to be an heiress.' Miranda's old room that used to be filled with light and air from the garden outside the two tall windows, was almost in darkness when they opened the door, with the Venetian blinds all drawn except on the narrow window above Sara's bed, still unmade and rumpled as she had slept in it last. 'A bit spooky in here, isn't it?' said the big blowsy girl, throwing down her brooms and getting to work. The blinds rattled up on a scene of depressing disorder. Sara's dressing-gown over the back of a chair, a pair of bedroom slippers on the washstand. 'Well, I never! She don't seem to have taken much with her,' she said, dragging at the bed covers. 'Here's a night-dress case and a sponge bag,' Mademoiselle said, 'with the sponge still in it. Madam told me she only packed a few necessary articles in a small basket, for the journey. It is best we put everything away in the wardrobe until Miss Sara returns after the holidays.'

Class
'They say the guardian's got plenty of cash,' Alice said cheekily. 'Won't do him any harm to buy the kid a new dressing-gown - shall I put fresh sheets on the bed over there? That was Miss Miranda's, wasn't it? Now there was a lovely girl for you! A real toff and never too high and mighty to have a bit of a laugh with Minnie and me.'

The blundering creature was insupportable. 'No. Take all the bed linen away and make the coverlets neat. Comme ça.' Miranda would never again sleep in this house...

'Beats me why young Sara didn't go off on Sunday morning in this nice blue coat with the fur collar. I'll say

a kid of thirteen don't have much sense when it comes to clothes.'

'Miss Sara left in a hurry and what she chose to wear for the journey has nothing to do with you, Alice. If you would please attend to the dusting - it must be nearly lunch-time.' She glanced up at the stopped clock on the marble mantelpiece, where a photograph of Miranda smiled calmly down from a small silver frame. Unlike the majority of photographs this one had an extraordinary feeling of life and reality. Alice went on dusting in offended silence and Mademoiselle stood looking up thoughtfully at the portrait of Miranda. 'Alice,' she said suddenly, 'was it you who brought Miss Sara her breakfast on Sunday morning?'

'Yes, Miss. Minnie was having a sleep in.'

'I hope she had an egg - and some fruit? She had a migraine all day Saturday and had eaten nothing.' Alice, who had completely forgotten Minnie's instructions about the sick child's breakfast and had in fact brought her nothing on Sunday morning, merely nodded, which somehow seemed less of a mortal sin than a barefaced lie. Anyway she was sick and tired of the boarders and their nonsense. And made up her mind, even as she finished dusting behind the two beds, to get herself a job as a waitress after Easter.

Dianne de Poitiers was especially wakeful on Tuesday night. The Easter moon, already large and brilliant, threw a silver shaft between the partly drawn curtains at her open window which overlooked a part of the west wing. There was a light burning in Minnie's room, otherwise the whole building - or as much as she could see of it - was in darkness. When she leaned out over the sill she could see the steeply

dreams = opposite

pitched slate roof shining under the moon and beyond it the squat little tower, black against the sky. Could it be true that the moon actually had something to do with the thoughts and even the actions of human beings millions of miles below on the earth? She could feel the tide of silver light flowing over her sensitive skin. Not only her mind but her whole being was preternaturally awake and aware. She lay down again on the bed but the faint zing-zing of a mosquito hovering close to the pillow twanged on the silence like a harp. Sleep on such a night was impossible. The moment she closed her eyes she began thinking about the child Sara. Was she too wide awake under the moon? What sort of man was the guardian behind his charming façade of good manners? Where had he taken her for the holidays? What did the future hold for the lonely unloved child? Miranda was the only one at the College who had ever made Sara smile and now Miranda was gone . . . Miranda . . . Miranda smiling down from the mantelpiece in the oval frame was Sara's most treasured possession. 'Imagine, Mam'selle! Miranda gave it to me for my birthday!'

'You should colour it, Sara - you are clever with your paint brush,' Mademoiselle had suggested. 'Miranda's hair is such a lovely colour - like ripe yellow corn.'

'I don't think Miranda would like that, Mam'selle. Irma Leopold was crazy to curl it up for her - for the photograph - but Miranda said "straight hair or nothing. Like it always is at home. Baby Jonnie wouldn't recognize his sister with curly hair".' And that other day, in the Ballarat Gardens. How clearly it all came back to her now. 'Sara - your pocket. It bulges like the toad!'

fated + mysterious

'Oh, no, Mam'selle! It isn't a toad.'

'Then what is it? It looks very ugly.'

'It's Miranda, Mam'selle. No, don't laugh. Please! If Blanche and Edith found out they would never stop teasing. You see I take it everywhere - even to church - it just fits, in that little oval frame. But promise me never to tell Miranda.' That small pointed face was flushed and solemn. 'Why not?' Dianne said, laughing. 'It is amusante, ça - nobody has ever taken me to church in their pocket.'

'Because,' said the child earnestly, 'Miranda wouldn't approve. She says she won't be here much longer and I must learn to love a whole lot of other people besides her.'

What could have occurred on Sunday morning to make her forget to take the portrait off the mantelpiece as usual? Such a little thing. So easily carried . . . In a hurry, Alice. I have just told you . . . Miss Sara was in a hurry and forgot her dressing-gown. A dressing-gown. A sponge bag. Easily forgotten by the excited child and grimly undomesticated adult who had helped to pack a few things in the little covered basket. But not the portrait. Never, never the portrait forgotten and left behind. Was she perhaps seriously ill? So ill that Madame had refused to admit it? Had the guardian, sworn to secrecy, driven the child away to a hospital? A puff of night air blew the lace curtains into the room . . . she was cold, dreadfully cold. And afraid. Throwing a wrapper over her shoulders, she lit a candle and sat down at her dressing-table to write to Constable Bumphre.

By the afternoon of Wednesday the twenty-fifth, the last of Hussey's cabs had carried the last of the boarders

fine + dates

down the drive. The silent rooms overflowed with drifts of paper, dropped pins, scraps of ribbon and string. In the dining-room the fire was out, the carnations in tall glass vases on their last legs. From the staircase the grandfather clock had become so loud that Mrs Appleyard fancied she could hear its everlasting tick-tock through the study wall. Minute by minute, hour by hour: like a heart beating in a body already dead. Minnie had come in at dusk with the mail on a silver salver. 'It's late today, Ma'am. Tom says it's because of the Easter trains. Shall I draw your curtains now?' 'As you like.'

'There's one here for Miss Lumley - will you take it?'

The Headmistress held out a hand. 'I shall have to find out the brother's address in Warragul.' Who but the Lumleys would have died without leaving an address? Dora Lumley had always been a muddler with her letters. Even now. She sat staring at the heavy curtains that shut out the gentle twilit garden, thinking how few things in life were unmuddled, firmly outlined as they were surely intended to be? One could organize, direct, plan each hour in advance and still the muddle persisted. Nothing in life was really watertight, nothing secret, nothing secure. Take people like Dora Lumley and the child Sara. Weaklings . . . you had them firmly under control and the moment you turned your head they wriggled through your fingers . . . Mechanically she picked up the pile of letters and began sorting them out as she always insisted on doing with her own hand. Two or three for the staff - one in Louis Montpelier's thin purple ink for Mademoiselle, a coloured postcard for Minnie from Queenscliff. The baker's preposterous account left by hand

in a dirty envelope. No cheques. Directly after Easter she would have to go to Melbourne and sell some shares, and she could go to Russell Street at the same time. If ever constructive action was called for it was now. Much as she would have preferred the privacy and solitude of dinner alone this evening she pulled the bell by the fireplace. 'Alice, I shall be dining downstairs with Mademoiselle and Miss Buck. Kindly tell Cook and ask her to send in a tray after dessert with black coffee, sugar and cream for three.' No detail at this juncture was unimportant - a specially careful toilet with a velvet bow at her throat and an extra brooch. Mademoiselle would notice such trifles and find them reassuring. Miss Buck of the blank toothfilled grin and thick spectacles might well be a suspicious type. One never knew with young women supposed to be brainy. There were dolts and dullards who saw too much, others who saw nothing. Oh, for the guiding hand of Arthur! Even the cool appraisal of Greta McCraw. For the first time in many weeks she thought of the mathematics mistress and brought her fist down on the dressing-table with such force that the combs and brushes and curling pins danced on its polished surface. It was inconceivable that this woman of masculine intellect on whom she had come to rely in the last years should have allowed herself to be spirited away, lost, raped, murdered in cold blood like an innocent schoolgirl, on the Hanging Rock. She had never seen the Rock but its presence was often with her of late - a brooding blackness solid as a wall. At dinner that evening the two young women had never seen the Head so gracious. Positively loquacious.

The governesses were already stifling their yawns after the hectic activities of the day when Miss Buck was requested to ring for Minnie. 'There is a little brandy, I think, in the decanter in the pantry? You remember, Minnie - the day the Bishop of Bendigo came to lunch?' The decanter and three glasses were brought. They sipped at it delicately and even drank to the health and good fortune of Mademoiselle and M. Montpelier. Dianne wearily taking up her candle at eleven o'clock thought it was the longest evening she had ever spent.

The clock on the stairs had just struck for half past twelve when the door of Mrs Appleyard's room opened noiselessly, inch by inch, and an old woman carrying a nightlight came out on to the landing. An old woman with head bowed under a forest of curling pins, with pendulous breasts and sagging stomach beneath a flannel dressing-gown. No human being - not even Arthur - had ever seen her thus, without the battledress of steel and whalebone in which for eighteen hours a day the Headmistress was accustomed to face the world.

From the window at the top of the staircase moonlight fell upon the row of closed cedar doors. Mademoiselle slept at the far end of the corridor, Miss Buck in a small room at the rear of the tower. The woman with the nightlight stood listening to the tick-tock, tick-tock, coming up out of the shadows below. A possum scudding across the leads overhead made her start so violently that the little lamp almost fell from her hand. By its feeble light the big double bedroom appeared in perfect order; fresh, chintzy and smelling faintly of lavender. The blinds were all drawn

to the same level, disclosing identical rectangles of moonlit sky and the dark tops of trees. The two beds, each with a pink silk eiderdown quilt neatly folded, were immaculate. On the dressing-table, flanked by two tall pink and gold vases, the heart-shaped pincushion where she had found and instantly destroyed the note. Again she saw herself bending over the child in the smaller of the two beds. Eyes, hardly a face now - only those enormous black eyes, burning into her own. Again she heard her cry out, 'No, no! Not that! Not the orphanage!' The Headmistress shivered, wishing she had put on a woollen spencer under her nightdress. She put the nightlight down on the bedside table, opened the cupboard where Miranda's dresses were still hanging on the left hand side and began methodically to go through the shelves. On the right, Sara's blue coat with the fur collar, a little beaver hat. Shoes. Tennis racquets. Now the bureau. Stockings. Handkerchiefs. Those ridiculous cards . . . dozens of them. Valentines. Directly after the holidays she would have Miranda's things removed. Now the dressing-table. The washstand. The little walnut work table where Miranda kept her coloured wools. Lastly the mantelpiece. Nothing of any significance there - only a photograph of Miranda in a silver frame. The first grey light was showing under the blinds as she closed the door, put out the nightlight and threw herself on to the great fourposter bed. She had found nothing, deducted nothing, decided nothing. Another dreadful day of enforced inaction lay ahead. The clock was striking five. Sleep was out of the question. She rose and began taking the curlers out of her hair.

Thursday was unseasonably warm and Mr Whitehead, who was taking Good Friday off, decided to do as much as he could in the garden today. No more rain yet by the looks of it although the top of the Mount was shrouded as usual in fluffy white mists. He thought the hydrangea bed at the back of the house could do with a watering. The place without the young ladies was strangely quiet but for the peaceful clucking of fowls and distant grunting of pigs, and now and then the rumble of wheels going past on the highroad. Tom had gone into Woodend in the buggy for the mail. Cook, with only a handful of adults to cater for instead of the usual complement of hungry schoolgirls, was having a grand clean up in the vast flagged kitchen. Alice was scrubbing the back stairs, she hoped for the last time. Miss Buck had gone off in a cab for an early train. Minnie was snatching ten minutes in her bedroom, greedily devouring a bunch of ripe bananas for which she had developed a passion during the last month, and joyfully letting out the waistband of her print frock, already too tight for comfort.

Madeleine
Dianne de Poitiers in a flurry of tissue paper was packing her small but elegant wardrobe. The very sight of the simple white satin wedding gown made her heart turn over. In a few hours' time Louis would be escorting her to the modest Bendigo lodging house where he had engaged a room for his fiancée until Easter Monday. She felt like a bird about to be set free after years of captivity in the cheerless room where she had so often cried herself to sleep, and began, very softly, to sing 'Au clair de la lune, mon ami pierrot'. From the open window the bittersweet

little tune floated out over the lawn where Mrs Appleyard was discussing with Mr Whitehead the planting of a new border for the drive. 'Have to be getting on to it after Easter, Ma'am, if you want a nice show for the Spring.' Salvias? They were a useful sort of flower, Madam suggested. The gardener half-heartedly agreed. 'A lot of young ladies have their favourites. Funny thing I can never see a Christmas lily without thinking of Miss Miranda. "Mr Whitehead," she used to say, "lilies always make me think of angels." Well, she's probably one herself now, poor young creature.' He sighed. 'How about pansies?' The Headmistress forced her thoughts to pansies and observed that they made a good show from the front gate. 'Now little Miss Sara - she's the one for pansies. Often begs a few off me for her room. You feeling cold, Ma'am? Could I fetch you a shawl?' 'One expects to feel chilly in March, Whitehead. Is there anything else you want to discuss before I go indoors?'

'Only about the flag, Ma'am.'

'Good gracious, what flag? Is it important?' Her foot tapped impatiently on the gravel. 'I have a good deal to attend to today.'

'Well,' said the gardener, an avid reader of the local papers, 'it's like this. The *Macedon Standard* is asking anyone in the district who has a flag to fly it on Easter Monday. It seems the Lord Mayor is coming from Melbourne for lunch at the Shire Hall.'

A double brandy after breakfast had made her head as clear as a bell. In a flash she saw the Union Jack floating out from the tower, a signal to the prying gossiping world that all at Appleyard College was well. She said graciously:

'By all means run up the flag. You will find it under the stairs – you remember we put it there after the Queen's birthday last year.'

'That's right. I folded it up and put it away myself.' Tom was beside them with the mail bag. 'Only one letter for you, Ma'am. Will you take it here or shall I bring it inside?'

'Give it to me.' She turned and left them without another word. 'She's a funny one, that,' the gardener said. 'I wouldn't mind betting she don't know a pansy from a chrysanthemum unless I tell her which is which.' And he made up his mind to put in begonias all down the drive.

The letter was addressed to Mrs Appleyard in a distinguished hand, precise and unfamiliar. Dated two days ago from an expensive Melbourne hotel, it read:

Dear Mrs Appleyard,

I regret that as I have been looking into my mining interests in North Western Australia, with no possible means of communication, I have been unable to forward the enclosed quarterly cheque for Sara Waybourne's fees until today. The purpose of this letter is to let you know that I intend calling at the College for Sara on the morning of Easter Saturday (28th). I trust this arrangement will be convenient to you as I am occupied all day on Good Friday and don't care for her to be here alone at the hotel, excellent though it is. If Sara is in need of any new clothes, books, drawing materials, etc., could you kindly have a list made out so that we can do some shopping together in Sydney where I shall be taking my ward for a few days holiday. As Sara must now be nearly fourteen, which I find hard to

realize, I imagine something more sophisticated in the way of a party dress would be appreciated? Anyway, you can give me your views when we meet.

With kindest regards and hoping once again that you will not be inconvenienced by looking after Sara (of course, at my expense) until Saturday.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Jasper B. Cosgrove.