

was in such a muddle I couldn't think properly. My Aunt came in here and started talking to the nurse - I think they thought I was asleep. 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?

'That's right. To look for the sheilas . . . Take it easy, Mike, you don't look too good on it yet.'

'I found one of them. Is that right?'

'That's right,' Albert said again. 'You found her and she's up here at the Lodge, alive and kicking.'

'Which one?' Michael asked in a voice so low Albert could hardly hear. The lovely face - lovely even on the stretcher as they had carried her down the Rock, was always in his mind now. 'Irma Leopold. The little dark one, with the curls.'

The room was so quiet that Albert could hear Mike's heavy breathing as he lay with his face turned to the wall. 'So you've nothing to worry about,' Albert said. 'Only to hurry up and get well . . . Stone the crows! He's passed out! Where's that bloody nurse got to . . .?' The ten minutes had expired and she was here at the bedside, doing something with a bottle and spoon. Albert slipped past her through the French windows and made his way to the stables with a heavy heart.

why dig

Bad Writing!

GIRL'S BODY ON ROCK - MISSING HEIRESS FOUND. Once again the College Mystery was front page news, embellished with the wildest flights of imagination, public and private. The rescued girl was still unconscious at Lake View, and the Hon. Michael Fitzhubert was not well enough to be questioned. Which added fuel to the flame of gossip and rumoured horrors to be later disclosed. The police search of likely and unlikely places in the locality had been resumed with extra men from Melbourne, the dog and tracker brought back on the remote possibility of unearthing a clue to the fate of the other three victims. Drains, hollow logs, culverts, waterholes: an abandoned pigsty where someone had seen a light moving last Sunday. At the bottom of an old mineshaft in the Black Forest a terrified schoolboy swore he had seen a body; and so he had - the carcass of a decomposed heifer. And so it went on. Constable Bumper, still conscientiously

Moments like these = authorial voice

Appleby's focus

Post Colonial no abo now = watch Kay!

259 - use re mystery!
sweating over notebooks filled with unanswerable questions, would almost have welcomed a brand new murder.

At Appleyard College the news of Irma's rescue was briefly and formally announced by the Headmistress directly after prayers on the following Monday morning; a carefully considered procedure that allowed a full hour for its assimilation before the first classes of the day. After a moment of stunned silence it was received with outbursts of hysterical joy, tears, fond embraces between people barely on speaking terms. On the staircase, where loitering was strictly forbidden, Mademoiselle had come upon Blanche and Rosamund locked in tearful embrace - 'Alors, mes enfants, this is no moment for tears' - and felt her own, long unshed, rising to her eyes. In the kitchen, Cook and Minnie rejoiced over a glass of stout, while on the other side of the baize door Dora Lumley clutched the cheap lace at her throat as if she too had been rescued upon the Rock. Tom and Mr Whitehead, at first jubilant in the potting shed, had soon passed on to murder in general, winding up with Jack the Ripper and the gardener gloomily supposing he must be getting back to his lawns. By midday the inevitable reaction from the rapturous relief of the morning was general. Afternoon classes assembled to an undercurrent of whisperings and mutterings. In the governesses' sitting-room the subject of Irma's discovery was barely touched on. As if by common consent the thin veils of make-believe obscuring the ugly realities were left intact, and only the Headmistress, behind the closed doors of her study, permitted herself a coldblooded scrutiny of this new turn of affairs. With the finding of only one

which Lindsay has created!! Why now: for whom: USE!!
of the four missing persons, the situation as it affected the College had actually deteriorated.

Strong-minded persons in authority can ordinarily grapple with practical problems of facts. Facts, no matter how outrageous, can be dealt with by other facts. The problems of mood and atmosphere known to the Press as 'Situations' are infinitely more sinister. A 'situation' cannot be pigeonholed for reference and the appropriate answer pulled out of a filing cabinet. An atmosphere can be generated overnight out of nothing or everything, anywhere that human beings are congregated in unnatural conditions. At the Court of Versailles, at Pentridge Gaol, at a select College for Young Ladies where the miasma of hidden fears deepened and darkened with every hour.

Waking next morning from uneasy sleep, the Headmistress could feel its pressure on a head already heavy under a hedgehog assortment of steel curling pins. In the dragging hours between midnight and dawn she had resolved, not without certain misgivings, on a change of policy: a mild relaxation of discipline and variation of the daily scene. To this end, the boarders' sitting-room was hastily re-papered in a ghastly shade of strawberry pink, and a grand piano was installed in the long drawing-room. The Reverend Lawrence and his wife were invited to drive out one evening from the Vicarage at Woodend with lantern slides of the Holy Land to be shown in the drawing-room, where Mr Whitehead's choicest hydrangeas were banked up in the fireplaces and coffee, sandwiches and fruit salad were served by the maids in long-tailed caps and frilled aprons. The whole thing presented the perfect

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picture of a fashionable boarding school at the height of material prosperity and educational well-being. Yet little Mrs Lawrence drove away with a migraine, unaccountably depressed. In vain were the senior girls sent into Bendigo by train with a governess to witness a matinée of *The Mikado*. They returned if anything in lower spirits: people in the audience had stared and whispered as they took their seats in the front row. They felt themselves a part of the spectacle – the cast of the College Mystery – and were thankful to climb into the waiting wagonettes.

Conscious of a tactical blunder, the Headmistress decided on other and harsher means; a tighter rein on the always too talkative staff and enforcement of the rule forbidding confidential chattering of groups unattended by a governess. Henceforth the daily crocodile of girls in their summer uniforms and ugly straw hats wound its way two and two along the Bendigo high road in the prescribed and grudging silence of a female chain gang.

VSE
Easter was approaching and with it the end of the term. Already the summer flowers were fading and one morning splashes of gold appeared amongst the willows fringing the creek behind the house. The garden held no autumn delights for the Headmistress to whom well-kept beds and lawns were no more than a symbol of prestige. Neatness was all – and a continuous array of showy blooms to be admired beyond the stone walls by passers-by on the high road. The leaves fluttering down from the little tree outside her study window were an unnecessary reminder of the passing of time. It was now nearly a month since the day of the picnic. Mrs Appleyard had lately spent a

few days in Melbourne, largely at police headquarters in Russell Street. Here the first thing to catch an eye continually on the alert was a notice pinned on an official board: MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD above a detailed description and three extremely bad photographs of Miranda, Marion and Greta McCraw. The word DEAD leaped obscenely from the printed page. Yes, it was possible, but highly unlikely, said the Senior Detective with whom she was closeted for two hours in a stuffy room, that the girls had been abducted, lured away, robbed – or worse. 'And what,' asked the Headmistress, tightlipped and clammy with fear and the insufferable heat of the room, 'could be worse, may I ask, than that?' It appeared that they might yet be found in a Sydney brothel: such things happened now and then in Sydney when girls of respectable background disappeared without a trace. Not often in Melbourne. Mrs Appleyard could only shudder. 'They were exceptionally intelligent and well-behaved girls who would never have allowed any familiarity from strangers.'

'As far as that goes,' said the detective blandly, 'most young girls would object to being raped by a drunken seaman, if that's what you have in mind.'

'I did not have it in mind. My knowledge of such things is necessarily limited.' The detective drummed squat tobacco-stained fingers on the top of his desk. These perfect ladies were the Devil. Dirty minded as they come, he wouldn't mind betting. Aloud he said mildly, 'Exactly. Most unlikely under the circumstances. However, we policemen have to consider every possible avenue in a case of this kind where not a single clue has come to light since the day it was

reported. February the fourteenth, if I remember without looking it up.'

'That is so. Saint Valentine's Day.'

USE
A For a moment he wondered if the old girl was going off her head. Her face was an unpleasant mottled red. He didn't want her fainting on him and rose, declaring the abortive interview at an end. For Mrs Appleyard, staggering out into the glaring heat of the street, the interview was over, but the nightmare remained and would not be exorcised by a sleeping pill, nor a glass or two of brandy at her city hotel.

Back at the College, a series of setbacks and disturbing happenings had been accumulating. During her absence a father had called with a seemingly reasonable excuse for taking his daughter away with him then and there. Without the support of Greta McCraw, who in times of crisis could be unexpectedly shrewd, even practical, Mademoiselle had felt obliged to comply, and Miss Lumley was requested to arrange for the packing and despatch of Muriel's boxes to Melbourne. Worse still, the French Governess had handed in her resignation, 'on account of my approaching marriage to M. Louis Montpelier, shortly after Easter,' as soon as Mrs Appleyard had taken off her hat in the hall. The Headmistress knew a lady when she saw one, and Mademoiselle de Poitiers was definitely a social asset on the staff, not to be easily replaced. Miss McCraw's position had already been filled by a breezy young graduate with prominent teeth and the unhappy name of Buck, to whom the boarders had taken an instant dislike. Greta McCraw for all her impersonal barking had never been known to bite an individual wrong-doer.

There was a pile of correspondence on Mrs Appleyard's desk this evening, which had to be read through, weary as she was, before she could allow herself to go to bed. Thank Heaven, nothing with a Queensland postmark! First to be opened was a request from a South Australian mother, that her daughter 'for urgent family reasons' be sent home immediately on the Adelaide Express. The girl's people were well off, highly respected citizens. What irresponsible talk had they been listening to, smug in their suburban mansion? Family reasons! Pah! She took the brandy bottle from the cupboard and had opened two more letters before noticing Mr Leopold's telegram at the bottom of the pile. Sent a few days ago, from some God-forsaken address in Bengal, the peremptory wording was utterly unlike the usual extravagant Leopold technique. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES IS MY DAUGHTER TO RETURN TO APPELYARD COLLEGE. LETTER FOLLOWS. To lose in such a manner her richest and most admired pupil made her feel physically faint, almost sick. The implications of this new catastrophe were dangerous and unending. Only a few weeks ago the Headmistress had been telling the Bishop's wife: 'Irma Leopold is such a charming girl. Worth half a million when she turns twenty-one, so I understand... her mother was a Rothschild, you know.' Two enormous bills from butcher and grocer completed the day's tally of woe.

Late as it was, she felt impelled to take out the College Ledger. Several of the boarders' fees were outstanding. Although commonsense told her that prompt payment in advance of next term's fees could hardly be expected, under the circumstances, from Miranda's parents or the

legal guardian of Marion Quade, she had been relying on the Leopold cheque with its numerous extras – dancing, drawing, monthly matinées in Melbourne, all of which showed a handsome profit to the College. On the neatly ruled page another name stood out: Sara Waybourne. Sara's elusive guardian had failed to show himself at her study door for several months, his usual fee-paying procedure, with the amount taken from his pocket book in cash. At the present moment, a whole term of Sara's extras was still unpaid for. For Mr Cosgrove, always expensively dressed, who left behind him in the study the tang of eau de Cologne and morocco leather, there was no excuse for delay.

Nowadays the very sight of the child Sara slumped over a book in the garden was enough to send a flush of irritation crawling up the Head's neck under the boned net collar. The small pointed face was somehow the symbol of the nameless malady from which every inmate of the College was suffering in varying degrees. If it had been a weak rounded childish face it might have aroused an answering pity instead of a sense of resentment that one so puny and pale possessed a core of secret strength – a will as steely as her own. Sometimes, catching sight of Sara's bent head in the schoolroom, where the Headmistress occasionally descended from Olympus to deliver a Scripture lesson, the sour taste of an unmentionable passion had momentarily choked her utterance. Yet the wretched child had remained outwardly docile, polite and diligent: only the secret pain in the absurdly large eyes. It was long past midnight. She rose, put the ledger back in its drawer and climbed heavily upstairs.

The following morning as Sara Waybourne was getting ready her drawing materials for Mrs Valange's art class, she was summoned to the Headmistress's desk.

'I have sent for you, Sara, because of a serious matter I have to explain to you. Stand up straight and listen very carefully to what I have to say.'

'Yes, Mrs Appleyard.'

'I don't know if you are aware that your guardian has failed to pay for your education here for several months? I have written to him at the usual bank address but my letters have been returned from the Dead Letter Office in every case.'

'Oh,' said the child without a change of expression.

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

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

'I remember. It was most inconvenient.'

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

'Crayons? That reminds me, since you can give me no help in this unfortunate matter I shall have to tell Mrs Valange 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. Is that a hole in your stocking? You would be better employed learning to darn than playing about with books and coloured pencils.'

Sara had just reached the door when she was called back. '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.'

For the first time a change of expression flickered behind the great eyes. 'What arrangements?'

'That will have to be decided. There are Institutions.'

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

'One must learn to face up to facts, Sara. After all, you are thirteen years old. You may go.'

While the above conversation was taking place in the study, Mrs Valange, the visiting art mistress from Melbourne, was being hoisted into the dog-cart outside the Woodend Station by the nimble Tom, to whom the little lady clung like a drowning sailor, weighed down as usual by a sketching pad, umbrella and bulging valise. The contents of the valise were invariably the same: for the senior pupils, a plaster cast of Cicero's head wrapped in a flannelette nightgown in case his beak of a nose got chipped in the rattling of the Melbourne train; a plaster foot for the juniors; a roll of Michalet paper; and for herself a pair of easy slippers with woollen pompoms and flask of cognac. (A taste for French brandy, had it ever come up for discussion, was about the only subject on which Mrs Valange and Mrs Appleyard were of the same mind.)

'Well now, Tom,' began the voluble and always agreeable art mistress as they turned into the highway under the shade of the eucalypts. 'How's your sweetheart?'

Tom + Minnie
'To tell you the truth, Ma'am, me and Minnie are both giving the Madam notice at Easter. We don't seem to fancy it here any more if you know what I mean.'

'I do know, Tom, and I'm sorry to hear it. You can't think what horrible things people are saying about all this in the city, though I tell everyone it's best forgotten.'

'You're right there, Ma'am,' Tom agreed. 'All the same Minnie and me will remember Miss Miranda and the other poor creatures till our dying day.'

As the dog-cart turned in at the College gates his passenger caught sight of her favourite pupil Sara Waybourne on the front lawn, and briskly waved her umbrella. 'Good morning, Sara - no thank you, Tom, I prefer to carry the valise myself - come here, child - I've brought you a lovely new box of pastels from Melbourne. Rather expensive I'm afraid but it can go down on your account ... you're looking rather doleful this morning.'

Mrs Valange's reception of Sara's depressing news was characteristic. 'Not go on with your art classes? Nonsense! I am not in the least worried about your fees considering you are the only one with an ounce of talent. I shall go straight to Mrs Appleyard and tell her so - we have ten minutes before the class begins.'

The interview which now took place behind the closed door of the study is unnecessary to record in detail. For the first and last time the two ladies stood face to face with the gloves off. After a few perfunctory civilities on both sides, the fight was on, warmhearted little Mrs Valange lashing out with colourful accusations emphasized by a dangerously waving umbrella, Mrs Appleyard shaken out of her usual public calm growing even more immense and purple. At last the door of the study was actually heard to slam and the art mistress, a moral victor, though beaten

on a point of professional procedure, stood with heaving bosom in the hall. Tom was summoned, and Mrs Valange, clutching the umbrella and the valise with Cicero still wrapped in the nightdress, was hoisted into the dog-cart and driven away to the station for the last time.

After a brief unwonted silence in which his passenger scribbled on scraps of paper with a piece of coloured chalk, Tom was handed a half crown and an envelope addressed to Sara Waybourne, with instructions to deliver it as soon as possible without Mrs Appleyard's knowledge. Tom had been only too happy to oblige. He had a soft spot for little Mrs Valange as he had for Sara, and had every intention of handing her the letter next morning when the boarders congregated for half an hour after breakfast in the garden. However, he was unexpectedly sent off on an errand for the Head, and the letter went out of his mind.

Weeks later, when he came across it crumpled at the back of the drawer, and Minnie read it out to him by the light of her candle, it kept both of them awake half the night. Although as Minnie very sensibly pointed out, what was the use of worrying their soul cases out? It was hardly Tom's fault, under the circumstances, that the letter had never been delivered. *Dear child*, she had written, *Mrs A. has told me everything - what a ridiculous fuss about nothing! This is to tell you I want you to come and stay with me for as long as you like at my home in East Melbourne - address enclosed - if your guardian doesn't come for you by Good Friday. Just let me know and I will arrange to meet the train. Don't worry about the*

art lessons and keep on drawing whenever you get a spare minute, like Leonardo da Vinci. Fond love. Your friend, Henrietta Valange.

Mrs Valange's dramatic exit from the College intensified the strains and tensions of the last few days. Despite frustrating rules of silence and the ban on talking in twos and threes without a governess in attendance, it had been conveyed before nightfall, by the passing of scraps of paper and other news-carrying devices, that a Scene had occurred in the study and that the child Sara was somehow to blame. Sara, as usual, had nothing to communicate. 'Creeping about like an oyster,' as Edith, never strong on natural history, pointed out. 'If we don't get a handsome young drawing master,' said Blanche, 'I'm going to give up Art. I'm sick of coloured chalk in my nails.' Dora Lumley came bustling up: 'Girls, didn't you hear the dressing bells? Go upstairs at once and take an order mark each for talking in the passage.'

A few minutes later, still on the prowl, Miss Lumley came upon Sara Waybourne curled up behind the little door of the circular staircase leading to the tower. The governess thought she had been crying, but it was too dark to see her face properly. When they came out on to the landing under the light from the hanging lamp the child looked like a stray half-starved kitten. 'What's the matter, Sara? Are you feeling ill?' *Sara*

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

'People don't sit down on cold stone in the dark just before tea time, unless they're weak in the head,' Miss Lumley said.

Lumley
'I don't want any tea. I don't want anything.' The governess sniffed. 'Lucky you! I only wish I could say the same.' She thought: 'This wretched snivelling child. This horrible house . . .' and decided to write to her brother this very night asking him to look out for a position. 'Not a boarding school. I tell you - I can't stand much more of it, Reg . . .' It was as much as she could do not to scream as the tea bell clanged through the empty rooms below. The mice frisking in the long dark drawing-room had heard it too and scampered off under the shrouded sofas and chairs. 'You heard the bell, Sara? You can't go down like that with cobwebs all over you. If you aren't hungry, you had better go to bed.'

It was the same room that Sara had formerly shared with Miranda - the most coveted room in the house, with long windows overlooking the garden, and rose-patterned curtains. Nothing had been changed since the day of the picnic, by Mrs Appleyard's express instructions. Miranda's soft pretty dresses still hung in orderly rows in the cedar cupboard from which the child invariably averted her eyes. Miranda's tennis racquet still leaned against the wall exactly as it did when its owner, flushed and radiant, came running upstairs after a game with Marion on a summer evening. The treasured photograph of Miranda in an oval silver frame on the mantelpiece, the bureau drawer still stuffed with Miranda's Valentines, the dressing table where she had always put a flower in Miranda's little crystal vase. Often, pretending sleep, she had lain awake watching Miranda brushing out her shining hair by the light of a candle.

'Sara, are you still awake, you naughty Puss?' smiling into the dark pool of the mirror. And sometimes Miranda would sing, in a special tuneless voice that only Sara knew, strange little songs about her family: a favourite horse, her brother's cockatoo. 'Some day, Sara, you shall come home with me to the station and see my sweet funny family for yourself. Would you like that Pussy?' Oh, Miranda, Miranda . . . darling Miranda, where are you?

At last night came down upon the silent wakeful house. In the south wing Tom and Minnie, locked in each other's arms, murmured endlessly of love. Mrs Appleyard tossed in her curling pins. Dora Lumley sucked peppermints and wrote interminable letters to her brother in her fevered head. The New Zealand sisters had crept into the same bed for company and were lying side by side, taut and fearful of an impending earthquake. A light was still burning in Mademoiselle's room, where a stiff dose of Racine, by the light of a solitary candle, had so far failed as a soporific. The child Sara was also wide awake, staring into the dreadful dark.

Presently the possums came prancing out on to the dim moonlit slates of the roof. With squeals and grunts they wove obscenely about the squat base of the tower, dark against the paling sky.