

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

Picnic at Hanging Rock



Mystery by
Laura Annawyn Shamas
Adapted from the book by
Lady Joan Lindsay
© The Dramatic Publishing Company

“This is a vibrant script which provides ample opportunities for strong female portrayals. The elements of mystery provide fun, but the story is also meaningful in theme. One of the best plays I've done in 17 years.”
Richard Bellamy, Cape Cod Academy, Osterville, Mass.

Picnic at Hanging Rock

Mystery. By Laura Annawyn Shamas. Based on the book by Lady Joan Lindsay. Cast: 8m., 18w. For a group of Australian schoolgirls, a romantic Valentine's Day outing ends in an intriguing mystery. What has happened to the three seniors and the mathematics teacher on top of the jagged peaks of Hanging Rock? Based on Lady Joan Lindsay's runaway bestseller—also the source of the acclaimed Peter Weir film—this exciting play explores a baffling disappearance that takes its toll on a small community in the Australian countryside. Who in the large cast of fascinating characters is responsible for the crime? Is it the headmistress of the college who nips brandy on the sly? Does the young, beautiful French teacher know more than she will say to the police? And what about the two young men who watch the girls climb the mountain? Why do they return to the rock after the police investigation? Or maybe one of the remaining schoolgirls conspired against the others. A look at crisis, greed and honesty at the turn of the century. Hauntingly and ironically, the play shows that what seems pristine and proper on the outside may not be free of moral corruption on the inside. The final climactic twist is shocking and bittersweet, with an impact that is unforgettable. *Area staging. Code: P62.*

*Cover: Mt. Airy Players, featuring (l-r) Lisa Miller, Katy Elsasser, Hannah Cole and Jennifer Suidikas.
Photo: Pat Aaron. Cover design: Susan Carle.*

ISBN: 978-0-87129-248-3



9 780871 292483 >

www.dramaticpublishing.com



Dramatic Publishing
Your Source for Plays and Musicals Since 1885

311 Washington Street
Woodstock, IL 60098
800-448-7469

© The Dramatic Publishing Company

LADY JOAN LINDSAY'S

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

A Full-Length Play

by

LAURA ANNAWYN SHAMAS

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

311 Washington Street, Woodstock IL 60098



***** NOTICE *****

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING
P. O. Box 129., Woodstock, Illinois 60098

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

©MCMLXXXVII by
LAURA SHAMAS

Based on the novel, “Picnic at Hanging Rock” by
LADY JOAN LINDSAY
©MCMLXVII by the Literary Estate of Lady Joan Lindsay
Published by arrangement with Chatto & Windus, London

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK)

ISBN 0-87129-248-3

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. APPELYARD 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. APPELYARD. Good morning, girls.

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

MRS. APPELYARD. 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. APPELYARD 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 smoothes 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 Appleyard 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?