

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK

Tom Wright

ELIZABETH: Here is the gate that Miranda opened
To let the picnic party in
Here is the creek
Snaring the last afternoon light
In placid pools
Vertical walls
Of rock
Already deep shade
Undergrowth
Exuding dank forest breath of decay
After a life
Of linoleum
Asphalt
Axminster
Heavy flat-footed woman
Finally feels the springing earth
Sits on a fallen log
Removes her gloves
The blood it is bubbling under the surface
Wishing to break out,
Spread across the fields -
She can see for miles
Glinting rooves of Romsey
Mount Macedon
Farmsteads
Wisps of smoke
Haze of the city
An eagle circling in heaven
Perspiration trickles
Under stiff lace on her throat
It is as if no human being
Has ever come here
On this solid ghost of an explosion primeval
For the first time
It dawns on her
What it means
To climb this Rock
As the lost girls
Long, long ago
In full-skirted frocks

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Had climbed
Had climbed into -
She brings them to mind
Without compassion:
The dead
Both dead
All dead
The monstrous masses
The dark flood
The dead
Of course
This land is for the dead
More theirs than ours -
Stones slide under her feet
With every step
Higher
Harder
Heart pounding
Here a precipice
A spider large black
Sprawled on a stone
Always afraid of spiders
Recoils
There
Inside the rock
She sees Sara
One eye
Staring
A mask of rotting flesh
The old woman's hat falls off
And she sprints
To the edge
To the vast darkness
Sprints
Into the abyss
As we all should