



THE GETTING OF WISDOM

(ANNOTATED)

HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON

Henry Handel Richardson

The Getting of Wisdom (Annotated)

**Enriched Edition. A Coming-of-Age Satire of
Schoolgirl Rivalry, Class, and Female Adolescence in
Colonial Melbourne**

*In this **enriched edition**, we have carefully created added
value for your reading experience.*

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Fiona
Wethermere*

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Introduction

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Growing up often means discovering that the institutions meant to shape character can also intensify loneliness, self-consciousness, and the painful gap between how one feels and how one is expected to behave.

Henry Handel Richardson's *The Getting of Wisdom* is a coming-of-age novel set primarily in a girls' boarding school in Melbourne, Australia, and first published in the early twentieth century. It belongs to the tradition of the school story while also extending beyond it into psychological and social observation. Richardson uses the school environment not simply as a backdrop for youthful episodes, but as a compact world in which class, ambition, discipline, and performance become sharply visible. The novel's historical setting gives it specificity, yet its emotional conflicts remain immediately legible.

At its centre is Laura, a young girl entering a new educational world whose rules, hierarchies, and rituals she must learn to navigate. The novel follows her efforts to find a place within that environment while managing embarrassment, aspiration, sensitivity, and the desire to be recognized. Rather than depending on large external events, the narrative draws its momentum from everyday encounters, misunderstandings, impressions, and inner reactions. This makes the book especially attentive to the texture of adolescence: the way small social moments can feel decisive, and the way self-awareness can become both a gift and a burden.

One of the novel's most striking qualities is its voice. Richardson writes with close psychological attention, combining sympathy for youthful feeling with a clear-eyed awareness of vanity, pretence, and self-deception. The style is observant and controlled, often moving between irony and tenderness without flattening the complexity of Laura's experience. As a result, the reading experience is both intimate and analytical. Readers are invited to inhabit a young mind in formation, while also seeing the social pressures and illusions that shape that mind from the outside.

The *Getting of Wisdom* is deeply concerned with education, but not only in the formal sense suggested by classrooms and lessons. It examines the broader education imposed by social life: learning how authority works, how reputations are made, how exclusion operates, and how identity is negotiated in relation to peers. The title itself points toward experience rather than simple instruction. Wisdom here is not acquired neatly or painlessly. It emerges through exposure to rules, competition, desire for approval, and the gradual recognition that social success and genuine self-knowledge do not always coincide.

Another enduring theme is the performance of femininity within institutional and social expectations. The novel attends to the pressures placed on girls to be proper, likable, disciplined, and socially adept, while also revealing how unstable and demanding those standards can be. Questions of class and aspiration intersect with these pressures, shaping how characters judge one another and themselves. Because Richardson treats these dynamics with such precision, the novel continues to speak to readers interested in how adolescence is structured by systems of evaluation that are at once personal, cultural, and deeply unequal.

The book still matters because it captures a formative stage of life with unusual honesty, resisting both sentimentality and simplification. Contemporary readers can recognize in Laura's experience the lasting difficulties of self-fashioning under scrutiny: the fear of humiliation, the hunger to belong, and the struggle to reconcile inner life with public role. At the same time, the novel offers historical insight into girls' education and social discipline in Australia, making it valuable both as literature and as cultural record. Its continuing power lies in how precisely it shows wisdom arriving through discomfort, perception, and change.

Synopsis

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Henry Handel Richardson's *The Getting of Wisdom*, first published in 1910, is a coming-of-age novel centred on Laura Rambotham, a bright, sensitive girl sent from the Australian countryside to a Melbourne boarding school. The move uproots her from a freer domestic world and places her in a tightly regulated social environment where manners, reputation, and conformity shape daily life. From the outset, the novel follows Laura's effort to understand unfamiliar rules and to secure a place among her peers. Its narrative attention falls less on dramatic external events than on the subtle pressures through which a young mind is formed.

At school, Laura confronts the rituals and hierarchies of adolescent society. She is observant and imaginative, but also impulsive, proud, and often painfully self-conscious, traits that make adaptation difficult. Richardson traces her attempts to win approval, conceal embarrassment, and interpret the behaviour of teachers and classmates whose judgments carry enormous weight. The boarding-school setting becomes a miniature social world, exposing how quickly alliances shift and how easily small incidents assume exaggerated importance. Laura's education therefore unfolds on two levels at once: formal lessons in the classroom and a more demanding apprenticeship in social codes, discipline, and self-presentation.

A central conflict in the novel lies between Laura's inward life and the expectations imposed upon her. She longs for

distinction and authenticity, yet repeatedly discovers that spontaneity can invite ridicule or misunderstanding. Her desire to shine academically, morally, or socially is complicated by insecurity and by her tendency to dramatize experience. Richardson presents these struggles with close psychological attention, showing how vanity, shame, ambition, and loneliness intermingle in adolescence. The result is not a simple tale of schoolgirl misfortune, but a nuanced account of how identity is tested when private feeling meets a world governed by custom, comparison, and the fear of exposure.

Relationships with other girls are especially important in shaping Laura's progress. Friendships, rivalries, admiration, and exclusion reveal the instability of status within the school and the emotional intensity of youthful attachments. Laura is often drawn to figures she idealizes, only to find that affection and esteem are entangled with competition and social calculation. Through these interactions, the novel examines class assumptions, feminine accomplishment, and the pressures placed on young women to be agreeable without appearing affected. Richardson avoids sentimentality, instead showing how ordinary encounters can leave lasting marks on a developing consciousness and teach difficult lessons about trust, performance, and belonging.

The adult authorities who oversee the school further complicate Laura's path. Teachers and administrators embody institutional values of order, respectability, and restraint, and their responses to Laura can seem at once corrective and opaque. She must learn not only what rules exist but how they are selectively interpreted, and how much depends on appearance as well as conduct. This gap between official ideals and lived reality deepens the novel's critique of education as a socializing force. The school is

meant to refine character, yet it also rewards imitation, suppresses vulnerability, and intensifies anxieties about failure, decorum, and public judgment.

As the narrative advances, Laura's experiences gradually enlarge her understanding of herself and of the world she inhabits. Setbacks, embarrassments, and moments of insight accumulate into a more complex awareness of the costs of ambition and the limits of childish fantasy. The novel remains attentive to the unevenness of growth: wisdom is not gained through a single revelation but through repeated collisions between hope and reality. Without depending on sensational turns, Richardson sustains interest through the precision of Laura's perceptions and the moral ambiguities of school life, inviting readers to observe how character forms under pressure rather than through simple triumph or defeat.

The *Getting of Wisdom* endures as a notable early twentieth-century Australian novel because it renders adolescence with unusual candour and psychological depth. Its portrait of a girl negotiating authority, class feeling, gendered expectation, and the longing for self-definition continues to speak beyond its immediate setting. Richardson's restrained, observant treatment of school life gives the book significance both as a bildungsroman and as a study of institutions that shape young people in lasting ways. Even while rooted in its historical moment, the novel remains resonant for its recognition that education often involves disillusionment as much as instruction, and self-knowledge as much as success.

Historical Context

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Henry Handel Richardson's *The Getting of Wisdom*, published in 1910, is set chiefly in Melbourne in the late nineteenth century, when the city was the capital of colonial Victoria and one of the largest urban centres in Australia. The novel draws on Richardson's own schooling in Melbourne during the 1880s. At that time, Victoria had been transformed by the wealth and migration generated by the 1850s gold rushes, which accelerated urban growth, expanded public institutions, and fostered confidence in colonial progress. This setting matters because the book's school world reflects a society that linked education, respectability, and advancement within an increasingly competitive colonial middle class.

A major institutional context for the novel is the Education Act of 1872 in Victoria, which made primary education free, compulsory, and secular. The law was central to the colony's effort to build a disciplined, literate population and reduce denominational conflict in schooling. Although Richardson's novel focuses on a girls' boarding school rather than state primary classrooms, it belongs to a culture in which educational reform was widely discussed and schooling carried heightened social significance. In late nineteenth-century Melbourne, schools did more than teach academic subjects: they shaped conduct, class aspiration, and ideas of proper femininity, all of which are crucial to the novel's depiction of adolescent experience.

The place of girls' education in colonial society is especially important. During the later nineteenth century, opportunities for girls expanded, but they remained framed by expectations of moral refinement, domestic accomplishment, and social decorum. Boarding schools for girls served middle-class families seeking polish, discipline, and cultural capital as much as intellectual training. Music, deportment, and correct manners often stood beside formal lessons as markers of success. Richardson's narrative emerges directly from this world. Its attention to school routine, peer judgment, and adult supervision reflects a historical moment when education for girls was widening, yet still tightly bound to ideals of respectability and controlled self-presentation.

Melbourne in the 1880s and early 1890s was a city of striking contrasts. A prolonged land boom encouraged speculation, conspicuous building, and the growth of suburbs and private institutions, including schools that catered to aspirant families. This prosperity ended in the severe economic depression of the 1890s, marked by bank failures, unemployment, and social strain. Although *The Getting of Wisdom* is not an economic novel, the culture it depicts was shaped by boom-era ambitions and anxieties about status. The pressures of appearance, success, and propriety in the school environment make more sense against a society deeply invested in display, advancement, and fragile middle-class security.

The novel also belongs to the broader history of the British Empire. In Richardson's youth, Victoria was a self-governing colony within an imperial system whose cultural standards remained strongly British. Schools transmitted English literary models, accents, manners, and assumptions about civilisation, often treating colonial life as derivative of metropolitan norms. This imperial framework influenced

both curriculum and social aspiration in Australian institutions. For colonial families, educational success could promise not only local advancement but also proximity to British cultural authority. Richardson's close observation of school values therefore reflects a colonial society measuring itself against imported ideals while developing its own distinct urban identity.

Religious and moral culture formed another important backdrop. Although Victoria's public education system was officially secular after 1872, Christian assumptions continued to shape social expectations, especially in relation to girls and women. Respectability, self-control, humility, and obedience were widely promoted as virtues, while breaches of decorum could carry lasting social consequences. Boarding schools often acted in loco parentis, extending family and moral surveillance into everyday student life. Richardson's portrayal of embarrassment, conformity, and the management of reputation draws force from this environment. The school is not merely an educational institution; it is a social mechanism for producing acceptable feminine behaviour in a tightly watched colonial community.

Richardson herself provides an essential historical lens. Born Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson in Melbourne in 1870, she attended the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne, before leaving Australia for Europe in 1888. She later built her literary career largely abroad and adopted the pen name Henry Handel Richardson. *The Getting of Wisdom* is widely recognised as drawing on her school experiences, though it is a novel rather than memoir. Her partially expatriate perspective is historically significant: it allowed her to revisit colonial Melbourne with distance, preserving specific details of institution and custom while subjecting them to sharp scrutiny rather than patriotic celebration.

Seen in this context, *The Getting of Wisdom* reflects and critiques several defining features of late colonial Australia: faith in education, attachment to British standards, middle-class concern with status, and restrictive ideals of girlhood. Its school setting condenses broader social pressures into daily rituals of competition, imitation, and discipline. Richardson does not present schooling simply as moral uplift; she shows how institutions meant to civilise can also expose pretence, enforce conformity, and reward performance over sincerity. In that sense, the novel is historically valuable not only for the world it depicts, but for its unsentimental view of the values that shaped colonial Melbourne on the eve of federation.

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I.

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The four children were lying on the grass[1q].

"... and the Prince went further and further into the forest," said the elder girl, "till he came to a beautiful glade[1]—a glade, you know, is a place in the forest that is open and green and lovely. And there he saw a lady, a beautiful lady, in a long white dress that hung down to her ankles, with a golden belt and a golden crown. She was lying on the sward[2]—a sward, you know, is grass as smooth as velvet, just like green velvet—and the Prince saw the marks of travel on her garments. The bottom of the lovely silk dress was all dirty——"

"Wondrous Fair, if you don't mind you'll make that sheet dirty, too," said Pin.

"Shut up, will you!" answered her sister who, carried away by her narrative, had approached her boots to some linen that was bleaching.

"Yes, but you know Sarah'll be awfly cross if she has to wash it again," said Pin, who was practical.

"You'll put me out altogether," cried Laura angrily. —"Well, as I said, the edge of her robe was all muddy—no, I don't think I will say that; it sounds prettier if it's clean. So it hung in long, straight beautiful folds to her ankles, and the Prince saw two little feet in golden sandals peeping out from under the hem of the silken gown, and——"

"But what about the marks of travel?" asked Leppie.

"Donkey! haven't I said they weren't there? If I say they weren't, then they weren't. She hadn't travelled at all."

"Oh, parrakeets[3]!" cried little Frank.

Four pairs of eyes went up to the bright green flock that was passing over the garden.

"Now you've all interrupted, and I shan't tell any more," said Laura in a proud voice.

"Oh, yes, please do, Wondrous Fair! Tell what happened next," begged Pin and Leppie.

"No, not another word. You can only think of sheets and parrakeets."

"Please, Wondrous Fair," begged little Frank.

"No, I can't now.—Another thing: I don't mind if you call me Laura to-day, as it's the last day."

She lay back on the grass, her hands clasped under her head. A voice was heard, loud, imperative.

"Laura, I want you. Come here."

"That's mother calling," said Pin.

Laura kicked her heels. The two little boys laughed approval.

"Go on, Laura," coaxed Pin. "Mother'll be angry. I'll come, too."

Laura raised herself with a grumble. "It's to try on that horrid dress."

In very fact Mother was standing, already somewhat impatient, with the dress in her hand. Laura wriggled out of the one she had on, and stood stiffly and ungraciously, with her arms held like pokers from her sides, while Mother on her knees arranged the length.

"Don't put on a face like that, miss!" she said sharply on seeing Laura's air. "Do you think I'm making it for my own pleasure?" She had sewn at it all day, and was hot and tired.

"It's too short," said Laura, looking down.

"It's nothing of the kind," said Mother, with her mouth full of pins.

"It is, it's much too short."

Mother gave her a slight shake. "Don't you contradict ME! Do you want to tell me I don't know what length you're to wear your dresses?"

"I won't wear it at all if you don't make it longer," said Laura defiantly.

Pin's chubby, featureless little face lengthened with apprehension.

"Do let her have it just a tiny bit longer, mother dear, dear!" she pleaded.

"Now, Pin, what have you got to do with it I'd like to know!" said Mother, on the verge of losing her temper over the back folds, which WOULD not hang.

"I'm going to school to-morrow, and it's a shame," said Laura in the low, passionate tone that never failed to

exasperate Mother, so different was it from her own hearty fashion of venting displeasure. Pin began to sniff, in sheer nervous anxiety.

"Very well then, I won't do another stitch to it!" and Mother, now angry in earnest, got up and bounced out of the room.

"Laura, how can you?" said Pin, dissolving. "It's only you who make her so cross."

"I don't care[2q]," said Laura rebelliously, though she was not far off tears herself. "It IS a shame. All the other girls will have dresses down to the tops of their boots, and they'll laugh at me, and call me a [P.4] baby;" and touched by the thought of what lay before her, she, too, began to sniffle. She did not fail, however, to roll the dress up and to throw it unto a corner of the room. She also kicked the ewer, which fell over and flooded the floor. Pin cried more loudly, and ran to fetch Sarah.

Laura returned to the garden. The two little boys came up to her; but she waved them back.

"Let me alone, children. I want to think."

She stood in a becoming attitude by the garden-gate, her brothers hovering in the background.—Then Mother called once more.

"Laura, where are you?"

"Here, mother. What is it?"

"Did you knock this jug over or did Pin?"

"I did, mother."

"Did you do it on purpose?"

"Yes."

"Come here to me."

She went, with lagging steps. But Mother's anger had passed: she was at work on the dress again, and by squinting her eyes Laura could see that a piece was being added to the skirt. She was penitent at once; and when Mother in a sorry voice said: "I'm ashamed of you, Laura. And on your last day, too," her throat grew narrow.

"I didn't mean it, mother."

"If only you would ask properly for things, you would get them."

Laura knew this; knew indeed that, did she coax, Mother could refuse her nothing. But coaxing came hard to her; something within her forbade it. Sarah called her "high-stomached", to the delight of the other children and her own indignation; she had explained to them again and again what Sarah really meant.

On leaving the house she went straight to the flower-beds: she would give Mother, who liked flowers very well but had no time to gather them, a bouquet the size of a cabbage. Pin and the boys were summoned to help her, and when their hands were full, Laura led the way to a secluded part of the garden on the farther side of the detached brick kitchen. In this strip, which was filled with greenery, little sun fell: two thick fir trees and a monstrous blue-gum stood there; high bushes screened the fence; jessamine climbed the wall of the house and encircled the bedroom windows; and on the damp and shady ground only violets grew. Yet, with the love children bear to the limited and compact, the

four had chosen their own little plots here rather than in the big garden at the back of the house; and many were the times they had all begun anew to dig and to rake. But if Laura's energy did not fizzle out as quickly as usual—she was the model for the rest—Mother was sure to discover that it was too cramped and dark for them in there, and send Sarah to drive them off.

Here, safely screened from sight, Laura sat on a bench and made up her bouquet. When it was finished—red and white in the centre with a darker border, the whole surrounded by a ring of violet leaves—she looked about for something to tie it up with. Sarah, applied to, was busy ironing, and had no string in the kitchen, so Pin ran to get a reel of cotton. But while she was away Laura had an idea. Bidding Leppie hold the flowers tight in both his sticky little hands, she climbed in at her bedroom window, or rather, by lying on the sill with her legs waving in the air, she managed to grab, without losing her balance, a pair of scissors from the chest of drawers. With these between her teeth she emerged, to the excited interest of the boys who watched her open-mouthed.

Laura had dark curls, Pin fair, and both wore them flapping at their backs, the only difference being that Laura, who was now twelve years old, had for the past year been allowed to bind hers together with a ribbon, while Pin's bobbed as they chose. Every morning early, Mother brushed and twisted, with a kind of grim pride, these silky ringlets round her finger. Although the five odd minutes the curling occupied were durance vile^[4] to Laura, the child was proud of her hair in her own way; and when in the street she heard some one say: "Look—what pretty curls!" she would give her head a toss and send them all a-rippling. In addition to this, there was a crowning glory connected with them: one hot December morning, when

they had been tangled and Mother had kept her standing too long, she had fainted, pulling the whole dressing-table down about her ears; and ever since, she had been marked off in some mysterious fashion from the other children. Mother would not let her go out at midday in summer: Sarah would say: "Let that be, can't you!" did she try to lift something that was too heavy for her; and the younger children were to be quelled by a threat to faint on the spot, if they did not do as she wished. "Laura's faint" had become a byword in the family; and Laura herself held it for so important a fact in her life that she had more than once begun a friendship with the words: "Have you ever fainted? I have."

From among these long, glossy curls, she now cut one of the longest and most spiral, cut it off close to the root, and with it bound the flowers together. Mother should see that she did know how to give up something she cared for, and was not as selfish as she was usually supposed to be.

"Oh .. h .. h!" said both little boys in a breath, then doubled up in noisy mirth. Laura was constantly doing something to set their young blood in amazement: they looked upon her as the personification of all that was startling and unexpected. But Pin, returning with the reel of thread, opened her eyes in a different way.

"Oh, Laura...!" she began, tearful at once.

"Now, res'vor!" retorted Laura scornfully—"res'vor" was Sarah's name for Pin, on account of her perpetual wateriness. "Be a cry-baby, do." But she was not damped, she was lost in the pleasure of self-sacrifice.

Pin looked after her as she danced off, then moved submissively in her wake to be near at hand should

intercession be needed. Laura was so unsuspecting, and Mother would be so cross. In her dim, childish way Pin longed to see these, her two nearest, at peace; she understood them both so well, and they had little or no understanding for each other.—So she crept to the house at her sister's heels.

Laura did not go indoors; hiding against the wall of the flagged verandah, she threw her bouquet in at the window, meaning it to fall on Mother's lap.

But Mother had dropped her needle, and was just lifting her face, flushed with stooping, when the flowers hit her a thwack on the head. She groped again, impatiently, to find what had struck her, recognised the peace-offering, and thought of the surprise cake that was to go into Laura's box on the morrow. Then she saw the curl, and her face darkened. Was there ever such a tiresome child? What in all the world would she do next?

"Laura, come here, directly!"

Laura had moved away; she was not expecting recognition. If Mother were pleased she would call Pin to put the flowers in water for her, and that would be the end of it. The idea of a word of thanks would have made Laura feel uncomfortable. Now, however, at the tone of Mother's voice, her mouth set stubbornly. She went indoors as bidden, but was already up in arms again.

"You're a very naughty girl indeed!" began Mother as soon she appeared. "How dare you cut off your hair? Upon my word, if it weren't your last night I'd send you to bed without any supper!"—an unheard-of threat on the part of Mother, who punished her children in any way but that of denying them their food. "It's a very good thing you're

leaving home to-morrow, for you'd soon be setting the others at defiance, too, and I should have four naughty children on my hands instead of one.— But I'd be ashamed to go to school such a fright if I were you. Turn round at once and let me see you!"

Laura turned, with a sinking heart. Pin cried softly in a corner.

"She thought it would please you, mother," she sobbed.

"I WILL not have you interfering, Pin, when I'm speaking to Laura. She's old enough by now to know what I like and what I don't," said Mother, who was vexed at the thought of the child going among strangers thus disfigured.—"And now get away, and don't let me see you again. You're a perfect sight."

"Oh, Laura, you do look funny!" said Leppie and Frank in weak chorus, as she passed them in the passage.

"Well, you 'ave made a guy of yourself this time, Miss Laura, and no mistake!" said Sarah, who had heard the above.

Laura went into her own room and locked the door, a thing Mother did not allow. Then she threw herself on the bed and cried. Mother had not understood in the least; and she had made herself a sight into the bargain. She refused to open the door, though one after another rattled the handle, and Sarah threatened to turn the hose in at the window. So they left her alone, and she spent the evening in watery dudgeon on her pillow. But before she undressed for the night she stealthily made a chink and took in the slice of cake Pin had left on the door-mat. Her natural buoyancy of spirit was beginning to reassert itself. By brushing her hair well to one side she could cover up the

gap, she found; and after all, there was something rather pleasant in knowing that you were misunderstood. It made you feel different from everyone else [\[3q\]](#).

Mother—sewing hard after even the busy Sarah had retired—Mother smiled a stern little smile of amusement to herself; and before locking up for the night put the dark curl safely away.

II.

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Laura, sleeping flat on her stomach, was roused next morning by Pin who said:

"Wake up, Wondrous Fair, mother wants to speak to you. She says you can get into bed in my place, before you dress." Pin slept warm and cosy at Mother's side.

Laura rose on her elbow and looked at her sister: Pin was standing in the doorway holding her nightgown to her, in such a way as to expose all of her thin little legs.

"Come on," urged Pin. "Sarah's going to give me my bath while you're with mother."

"Go away, Pin," said Laura snappily. "I told you yesterday you could say Laura, and... and you're more like a spider than ever."

"Spider" was another nickname for Pin, owed to her rotund little body and mere sticks of legs—she was "all belly" as Sarah put it—and the mere mention of it made Pin fly; for she was very touchy about her legs.

As soon as the door closed behind her, Laura sprang out of bed and, waiting neither to wash herself nor to say her prayers, began to pull on her clothes, confusing strings and buttons in her haste, and quite forgetting that on this eventful morning she had meant to dress herself with more than ordinary care. She was just lacing her shoes when Sarah looked in.

"Why, Miss Laura, don't you know your ma wants you?"

"It's too late. I'm dressed now," said Laura darkly.

Sarah shook her head. "Missis'll be fine an' angry. An' you needn't 'ave 'ad a row on your last day."

Laura stole out of the door and ran down the garden to the summer-house. This, the size of a goodly room, was formed of a single dense, hairy-leaved tree, round the trunk of which a seat was built. Here she cowered, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands. Her face wore the stiff expression that went by the name of "Laura's sulks," but her eyes were big, and as watchful as those of a scared animal. If Sarah came to fetch her she would hold on to the seat with both hands. But even if she had to yield to Sarah's greater strength—well, at least she was up and dressed. Not like the last time—about a week ago Mother had tried this kind of thing. Then, she had been caught unawares. She had gone into Pin's warm place, curious and unsuspecting, and thereupon Mother had begun to talk seriously to her, and not with her usual directness. She had reminded Laura that she was growing up apace and would

8 A verandah is a roofed porch or open gallery along the outside of a building, common in Australia and other warm climates. It provided a shaded outdoor passage and sitting area.

9 Governesses were private female teachers or resident school staff who supervised and taught girls. The term was widely used before modern school staffing terms became standard.

10 The Principia was a Latin grammar or textbook used in schools, often in a graded sequence. “Second Principia” means the second book or level in that series.

11 Consumption was the common 19th-century name for tuberculosis, a serious infectious disease, especially of the lungs. The older term appears frequently in literature set before modern medical language.

12 Mr. Strachey is one of the school’s senior male authorities, likely the principal or proprietor alongside Mrs. Gurley. The text shows him taking part in school prayers and administration.

13 Stays were a form of stiffened undergarment, similar to corsets, worn to shape the torso. They were common in earlier women’s fashion and are now largely obsolete.

14 The head of the school; in this chapter he is Mr. Strachey. “Principal” is the older term for what modern readers would usually call a headmaster or headmistress, depending on the school.

15 Sigismond Thalberg (1812–1871) was a famous 19th-century pianist and composer, known especially for virtuosic piano works. His music was widely associated with showy piano playing.

16 A sentimental song from the early 19th century, with words by John Howard Payne and music by Henry Bishop. It was extremely popular in the Victorian era and often arranged for piano.

17 A title for a musical theme and variations, a common piano form in which a melody is followed by decorative variations. The capitalisation suggests Laura is quoting the printed title of a piece rather than naming a familiar tune by ear.

18 The Italian poet (c. 1265–1321) best known for The Divine Comedy. He is one of the major figures of medieval European literature.

19 A famous dramatic poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, first published in parts between 1808 and 1832. It tells the story of a scholar who makes a pact with the devil.

20 A church name in the novel's Melbourne setting, likely a local Anglican church used by the girls' school community. The text does not identify it further, so the exact denomination or location should be taken from the context rather than assumed.

21 The colours associated with Trinity Church or Trinity College, used here as a school or church affiliation at the boat-race. In context, wearing them signals group loyalty rather than any modern sports uniform.

22 An old idiom meaning completely beaten or ruined. The phrase comes from the shape of a hat turned up on three sides, but by this period it was commonly used figuratively.

23 Short for delirium tremens, a severe form of alcohol withdrawal that can cause shaking, confusion, and

hallucinations. The uncle is joking about heavy drinking when he mentions it.

24 A padded undergarment worn at the back of a woman's skirt to create a fashionable rounded shape, especially in the late 19th century. It was common in Victorian dress but was already old-fashioned by the time of the novel's setting.

25 A large umbrella shared by several members of a household. The joke in the passage comes from the phrase being treated as if it described a family relation rather than an object.

26 A two-wheeled, horse-drawn cab designed in the 19th century by Joseph Hansom. It was a common urban taxi before motor cars replaced horse cabs.

27 The main covered seating area at a racecourse or sports ground. Here it refers to the elevated spectator stand at the cricket match.

28 An informal phrase for alcohol or a stimulant taken to gain temporary boldness. Here it means Laura feels she needs extra nerve before facing the others.

29 A legendary Anglo-Saxon noblewoman said to have ridden naked through Coventry to persuade her husband to reduce taxes. The story is part of English folklore, though its historical basis is uncertain.

30 A term used in Australia for a painful eye inflammation or infection, often associated in older usage with dusty, sandy conditions. It is not a precise modern medical diagnosis.

31 The narrow entrance to Port Phillip Bay, near Melbourne, between Point Lonsdale and Point Nepean. The passage