

INNOCENTS

by

Craig Delahoy

Based upon the novel by

Cathy Coote

First Draft

SAMPLE EXTRACT ONLY

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1 Uebergang St, Port Fairy, Victoria, 3284 Australia

SCENE 15: EXT FRONT OF SCHOOL DAY

It is early morning, before school. Everything is bathed in that fresh, early morning light. THE GIRL is walking to school, along the street. Ahead, near the school bus stop, she see that a small crowd has gathered – a ‘schoolgirl scrum’ as she would call it. Nearby is the teacher’s fiat, stopped in the middle of the road but at an odd angle. The group is gathered beside the car, almost concealing it. The girl goes to join the group, curiosity getting the better of her. Some of her friends are there, particularly RACHEL and SALLY, and LAURA and KELLY.

RACHEL

(Loudly) Yuck!

THE GIRL

(Still unable to see.) What’s happening?

RACHEL

He’s touching it! Oh, gross!

THE GIRL

What is it?

SALLY

Yuck! It’s bleeding!

RACHEL

Oh, that is so foul!

The girl pushes her way between one of the girls and the teacher's car. Doing so, she suddenly ends up in the middle of the scrum, surrounded by a crescent of her school friends on one side, and the car on the other.

Also in the middle of the scrum is THE TEACHER, kneeling on the grass, his back to the girl. In a flash, the girl sees that one of the teacher's hands has blood on it. At the same moment, a chorus of disgust rises from the group of girls.

SALLY

Oh sir! Gross!

LAURA covers her face in her hands.

KARA

Sir, just leave it!

RACHEL

Yerch, he's getting it all over his hands!

There is a quiet little howl, a sickly sound that we can't quite place. The girl moves a little closer, around the teacher, in order to better see what has caught all their attention. Finally, she sees.

The teacher is kneeling over the matted, blood-flecked body of a cat. There is a small pool of blood on the ground around it. The cat makes another of those little howls. Now we know that it is very injured, but not dead.

The teacher reaches out a hand, leaving it poised above the animal for an uncertain moment. Gently, he lowers it to the animal's head,

trying to bring comfort without causing more pain. The animal winces again, and the teacher pulls his hand back. This causes another stir amongst the girls.

In a moment of distracted frustration, the teacher wipes his forehead with his hand, leaving a small bloody smear above one eyebrow.

SALLY

Sir, that is disgusting. Just leave it.

THE TEACHER

I can't just leave her here. She'll die.

RACHEL

It's gonna die anyway.

(Note that the teacher refers to the cat as a female, but Rachel's response is gender neutral. The teacher is personalising, Rachel considers the animal an object.) The school bell sounds in the background.

THE TEACHER

We should get a vet ...

The crowd of girls begins to slowly break up, answering the call of the bell. Rachel, Sally, Laura and Kelly linger behind. Those girls that are leaving do so reluctantly, glancing back occasionally, or walking backwards.

RACHEL

(In the same tone, mimicking the teacher)

We should go in.

THE TEACHER

I can't ... quite ... pick her up.

The teacher tries gingerly to get his hands under the cat to lift it, but can't bring himself to actually get his fingers beneath it in case he hurts it.

RACHEL

(In the manner of a teacher rather than a student)

Do not pick it up. It's foul!

The few remaining girls nod.

RACHEL

(An order, her final word).

Just leave it.

Rachel picks up her bag and turns to leave. Her small group of disciples join her, and the teacher is left almost alone.

The girl sees all this. She puts her bag down in the gutter, and squats beside the teacher.

THE GIRL

I'll pick it up if you drive.

The teacher looks at her. There is a moment where his face betrays a feeling of wild, final hope. This changes slightly when he realises who it is – now it is almost the look of a damsel in distress seeing her rescuer. These looks are very subtle, almost subliminal, and pass in a heartbeat.

The girl finds a discarded plastic shopping bag in the gutter. She uses this almost as surgical gloves, between the cat and her hands as she slips her hands under the animal. The cat mews pathetically.

The teacher opens the passenger car door for her, fumbling like a nervous chauffeur. He picks up her schoolbag, then runs around the car and jumps in the driver's seat, throwing the bag in the back.

SCENE 16: INT TEACHER'S CAR DAY

The teacher settles into the seat and starts the car.

THE TEACHER

Do you know where there's a vet?

THE GIRL

Yup. Near the dentist's. Up from that supermarket.

They lurch and pull out; he drives in a slight panic, like an expectant father taking his moaning, pregnant wife to the hospital.

THE TEACHER

How's she doing? Do you think she'll be alright?

THE GIRL

Yeah, he'll be alright. He just needs to be stitched up.

THE TEACHER

(Looking out the windscreen, eyes glazed)

I didn't see her. I just felt this ...
bump ...

THE GIRL

It's okay, it can happen to anyone.

THE TEACHER

I just didn't see her ...

(Note the difference between the teacher and the girl – he refers to the cat as a female, the girl refers to the cat as a male.)

We see the cat on the girl's lap, the blood beginning to puddle on the shopping bag. We see a small trickle of blood run down one of her thighs, followed shortly by a second trickle.

SCENE 17: EXT OUTSIDE THE VET DAY

The car pulls up outside the vet. THE TEACHER leaps out, runs around the car and opens the passenger door. THE GIRL steps out, the cat and shopping bag bundled against her lap. They race into the vet's office.

SCENE 18: INT THE VET'S OFFICE DAY

THE TEACHER and THE GIRL enter and take their bundle to the receptionist's desk. THE VET'S RECEPTIONIST sees them approaching, and sees their bundle. She immediately adopts a medical professional's calm urgency, and leans toward an open window behind her desk.

THE TEACHER

(To the receptionist)

She's been run over!

VET'S RECEPTIONIST

(into the window, to a hidden person)

Malcolm, emergency ...

A moment passes, and THE VET enters.

THE TEACHER

(To the vet).

She's been run over.

The vet gives the cat a quick look over and hustles the teacher and the girl into surgery.

SCENE 19: INT THE VET'S SURGERY DAY

The group – THE VET, THE TEACHER and THE GIRL – enter the vet's surgery. The vet takes the cat and plastic bag from the girl, and places the bundle on the operating table that dominates the centre of the room.

Though we take no notice of it yet, at this point the girl's school dress has quite a prominent blood stain in the front.

The vet examines the cat, which is no longer making any sound.

THE VET

He'll have to be put down, I'm afraid. Is he yours?

The vet goes to a cupboard and begins preparing a syringe.

THE TEACHER

Er ... no. I don't know who she belongs to. I just felt this ... bump ... and stopped ...

(Note the difference between the teacher and the vet – the teacher is still referring to the cat as a female, while the vet [who we assume knows better] refers to the cat as a male.)

THE GIRL

Hasn't got a collar. Could be anyone's.

THE VET

(Drawing back the syringe, and said with little emotion, as if it's an old habit.)

Poor old thing.

The vet injects the cat, and almost immediately the animal is still.

THE VET

There. He won't feel any more pain now. Not much you can do when they're as badly injured as that.

The teacher's mouth is moving, as if he's trying to say something – perhaps to respond to the vet, or to ask a further question – but he is not able to get anything out.

THE VET

(Assuming what the teacher is trying to ask)

Don't worry. We'll dispose of him.

SCENE 20: EXT OUTSIDE THE VET DAY

As she opens the car door, THE GIRL sees that there are large drops of blood on the passenger seat. She now looks at her school dress, which has a large blood stain that covers almost the entire front of her dress from groin to hem. She absently lifts the hem of her dress, and sees that there is also drying blood on her thighs, where it has come through her dress and dripped down her legs. A quick turn of her skirt reveals that the back of the dress also has blood on it, where the drips of blood have soaked through from front to back. She makes no real reaction to the discoveries, and gets into the car.

SCENE 21: INT SCHOOL CORRIDOR DAY

THE TEACHER and THE GIRL walk along the school corridor, having just arrived back from the vet's. The teacher still appears dazed, the girl is still obviously blood soaked.

Two other schoolgirls walk toward them in the corridor. One indicates the bloodstain to the other girl, and they both giggle. Obviously they believe it to be some menstrual disaster.

Hearing their giggling and seeing their behaviour, the teacher finally looks properly at the girl and sees the stain.

THE TEACHER

(Embarrassed and distressed)

Oh, you've got it all over your dress! I'm so sorry, I didn't even see. Um ... Look, come along to the sick bay. We'll fix you up.

They move off down the corridor.

SCENE 22: INT SICK BAY TOILET DAY

THE GIRL is in the sick bay toilet. A clean uniform lies across the toilet bowl, waiting for her. We see her remove her school dress and discard it on the floor. She takes an old flannel and a worn cake of soap. She wets the flannel under the tap of the washbasin, wrings it and rubs in some soap. She uses this to wash the dried blood from her legs.

SCENE 23: INT OUTSIDE SICK BAY DAY

THE GIRL exits from the sick bay, now in her clean uniform, legs spotless. In one hand she carries the soiled dress in a rolled lump. She sees THE TEACHER leaning against a wall in the corridor outside. Her exit awakens him, and he stands up. Slightly nervous, his hands disappear into his jacket pocket.

THE TEACHER

(In an odd mix of formality and sentimentality)

I really appreciate what you did.

THE GIRL

(She doesn't look directly at him, but at his shirt)

That's alright.

THE TEACHER

I'm sorry about your dress.

THE GIRL

(Laughing)

I don't care about the dress.
Horrible thing. I hate wearing it.

We see that there is the shortest of moments where the teacher is mentally picturing this image – the girl not wearing a dress. It's just a flash, and then he closes his eyes and pushes it away. Now he feels the relief that she doesn't hold him responsible for anything.

THE TEACHER

You're sure?

The girl nods. She hasn't picked what he is certainly starting to feel. They begin to move back down the corridor, presumably to continue the business of the day.

THE TEACHER

Still, at least she didn't suffer.

THE GIRL

No, he didn't. At least ... not any more than was necessary ...

SCENE 26: EXT THE GIRLS SCHOOL DAY

It is lunchtime, and the usual gang has gathered at the usual place for lunch (same as scene 2). There is RACHEL, SALLY, LAURA and KELLY amongst others. THE GIRL arrives to join the group. As soon as they see her, there is some whispering and giggling. The girl sees this, senses it, is a little unsure ...

LAURA

Did you have a little accident
yesterday?

This is what the girl has been dreading for years. After working so hard to fit in, to blend with the crowd and be invisible, it appears she about to be unmasked as a freak. Nevertheless, the girl finds a certain stoney pride with which to face the crisis.

THE GIRL

What?

LAURA

I heard there was blood all over
you...

THE GIRL

Cat's blood.

With that, the girl turns and leaves the group. The other girls watch her go. This is the moment when we realise that the girl is now an outcast, no longer part of the group.

RACHEL

(Examining her nails, in an exact
reproduction of scene 2)

Freak.

SCENE 27: EXT THE BUSH TRACK DAY

It is the end of the day, raining. THE GIRL is walking home along the bush track, soaked from the rain but unconcerned about it. We can see that she has changed. She is no longer in control of her life. Her spirit is as soggy and dishevelled as her hair and clothes. At one point she violently rips the leaves from a tree as she passes.

THE GIRL

(V/O NARRATION)

I'd spent so many years
pretending to be one of them, to
be the same.

But now it was done. I was an
outcast – unclean.

I spent lunchtimes by myself. I was no longer invited to parties, no longer privy to the juicy bits of gossip.