

5 At that time many of the men looked like Rupert Brooke, whose portrait still hung in everyone's imagination. It was that dear-cut, 'typically English' face which is seldom seen on the actual soil of England but proliferates in the African Colonies.

10 'I must say,' said Sybil's hostess, 'the men look charming.' These men were all charming, Sybil had decided at the time, until you got to know them. She sat in the dark room watching the eighteen-year-old film unrolling on the screen as if the particular memory had solidified under the effect of some intense heat coming out of the projector. She told herself, I was young, I demanded nothing short of perfection. But then, she thought, that is not quite the case. But it comes to the same thing; to me, the men were not charming for long.

15 The first reel came to an end. Someone switched on the light. Her host picked the next film out of its tropical packing.

'It must be an interesting experience,' said her hostess, 'seeing yourself after all those years.'

'Hasn't Sybil seen these films before?' said a latecomer.

'No, never — have you, Sybil?'

20 'No, never.'

'If they had been my films,' said her hostess, 'my curiosity could not have waited eighteen years.'

The Kodachrome reels had lain in their boxes in the dark of Sybil's cabin trunk. Why bother, when one's memory was clear?

25 'Sybil didn't know anyone who had a projector,' said her hostess, 'until we got ours.'

'It was delightful,' said the latecomer, an elderly lady, 'what I saw of it. Are the others as good?'

Sybil thought for a moment. 'The photography is probably good,' she said. 'There was a cook behind the camera.'

‘A cook! How priceless; whatever do you mean?’ said her hostess.

‘The cook-boy,’ said Sybil, ‘was trained up to use the camera.’

‘He managed it well,’ said her host, who was adjusting the new reel.

5 ‘Wonderful colours,’ said her hostess. ‘Oh, I’m so glad you dug them out. How healthy and tanned and open-necked everyone looks. And those adorable shiny natives all over the place.’

The elderly lady said, ‘I liked the bit where you came out on the veranda in your shorts carrying the gun.’

‘Ready?’ said Sybil’s host. The new reel was fixed. ‘Put out the lights,’ he said.

10 It was the stoep again. Through the french windows came a dark girl in shorts followed by a frisky young Alsatian.

‘Lovely dog,’ commented Sybil’s host. ‘He seems to be asking Sybil for a game.’

‘That is someone else,’ Sybil said very quickly.

‘The girl there, with the dog?’

15 ‘Yes, of course. Don’t you see me walking across the lawn by the trees?’

‘Oh, of course, of course. She did look like you, Sybil, that girl with the dog. Wasn’t she like Sybil? I mean, just as she came out on the veranda.’

20 ‘Yes, I thought it was Sybil for a moment until I saw Sybil in the background. But you can see the difference now. See, as she turns round. That girl isn’t really like Sybil, it must be the shorts.’

‘There was a slight resemblance between us,’ Sybil remarked. The projector purred on.

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25 ‘Look, there’s a little girl rather like you, Sybil.’ Sybil, walking between her mother and father, one hand in each, had already craned round. The other child, likewise being walked along, had looked back too.

The other child wore a black velour hat turned up all round, a fawn coat of covert-coating, and at her neck a narrow white ermine tie. She wore white silk gloves. Sybil was dressed identically, and though this in itself was nothing to marvel at, since numerous small girls wore this ensemble when they were walked out in the parks and public gardens of cathedral towns in 1923, it did fortify the striking resemblance in features, build, and height, between the two children. Sybil suddenly felt she was walking past her own reflection in the long looking-glass. There was her peak chin, her black bobbed hair under her hat, with its fringe almost touching her eyebrows. Her wide-spaced eyes, her nose very small like a cat's. 'Stop staring, Sybil,'

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whispered her mother. Sybil had time to snatch the gleam of white socks and black patent leather button shoes. Her own socks were white but her shoes were brown, with laces. At first she felt this one discrepancy was wrong, in the sense that it was wrong to step on one of the cracks in the pavement. Then she felt it was right that there should be a difference.

'The Colemans,' Sybil's mother remarked to her father. 'They keep that hotel at Hillend. The child must be about Sybil's age. Very alike, aren't they? And I suppose,' she continued for Sybil's benefit, 'she's a good little girl like Sybil.' Quick-witted Sybil thought poorly of the last remark with its subtle counsel of perfection.

On other occasions, too, they passed the Coleman child on a Sunday walk. In summer time the children wore panama hats and tussore silk frocks discreetly adorned with drawn-thread work. Sometimes the Coleman child was accompanied by a young maid-servant in grey dress and black stockings. Sybil noted this one difference between her own entourage and the other girl's. 'Don't turn round and stare,'

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whispered her mother.

It was not till she went to school that she found Désirée Coleman to be a year older than herself. Désirée was in a higher class but sometimes, when the whole school was assembled on the lawn or in the gym, Sybil would be, for a few moments, mistaken for Désirée. In the late warm spring the classes sat in separate groups under the plane trees until, as by simultaneous instinct, the teachers would indicate time for break. The groups would mingle, and 'Sybil, dear, your shoe-lace,' a teacher might call out; and then, as Sybil regarded her neat-laced shoes, 'Oh no, not Sybil, I mean Désirée.' In the percussion band Sybil banged her triangle triumphantly when the teacher declared, 'Much better than yesterday, Sybil.' But she added, 'I mean Désirée.'

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Only the grown-ups mistook one child for another at odd moments. None of her small companions made this mistake. After the school concert Sybil's mother said, 'For a second I thought you were Désirée in the choir. It's strange you are so alike. I'm not a bit like Mrs Coleman and your daddy doesn't resemble him in the least.'

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Sybil found Désirée unsatisfactory as a playmate. Sybil was precocious, her brain was like a blade. She had discovered that dull children were apt to be spiteful. Désirée would sit innocently cross-legged beside you at a party, watching the conjurer, then suddenly, for no apparent reason, jab at you viciously with her elbow.

5 By the time Sybil was eight and Désirée nine it was seldom that anyone, even
strangers and new teachers, mixed them up. Sybil's nose became more sharp and
pronounced while Désirée's seemed to sink into her plump cheeks like a painted-on
nose. Only on a few occasions, and only on dark winter afternoons between the last
of three o'clock daylight and the coming on of lights all over the school, was Sybil
10 mistaken for Désirée.

Between Sybil's ninth year and her tenth Désirée's family came to live in her square.
The residents' children were taken to the gardens of the square after school by
mothers and nursemaids, and were bidden to play with each other nicely. Sybil
regarded the intrusion of Désirée sulkily, and said she preferred her book. She
15 cheered up, however, when a few weeks later the Dobell boys came to live in the
square. The two Dobells had dusky-rose skins and fine dark eyes. It appeared the
father was half Indian.

How Sybil adored the Dobells! They were a new type of playmate in her experience,
so jumping and agile, and yet so gentle, so unusually courteous. Their dark skins were
20 never dirty, a fact which Sybil obscurely approved. She did not then mind Désirée
joining in their games; the Dobell boys were a kind of charm against despair, for they
did not understand stupidity and so did not notice Désirée's.

The girl lacked mental stamina, could not keep up an imaginative game for long, was
shrill and apt to kick her playmates unaccountably and on the sly; the Dobells reacted
25 to this with a simple resignation. Perhaps the lack of opposition was the reason that
Désirée continually shot Sybil dead, contrary to the rules, whenever she felt like it.

Sybil resented with the utmost passion the repeated daily massacre of herself before
the time was ripe. It was useless for Jon Dobell to explain, 'Not yet, Désirée. Wait,
wait, Désirée. She's not to be shot down yet. She hasn't crossed the bridge yet, and
30 you can't shoot her from there, anyway — there's a big boulder between you and
her. You have to creep round it, and Hugh has a shot at you first, and he thinks he's
got you, but only your hat. And ...'

It was no use. Each day before the game started the four sat in conference on the
short dry prickly grass. The proceedings were agreed. The game was on. 'Got it all
35 clear, Désirée?'

‘Yes,’ she said, every day. Désirée shouted and got herself excited, she made foolish sounds even when supposed to be stalking the bandits through the silent forest. A few high screams and then, ‘Bang-bang,’ she yelled, aiming at Sybil, ‘you’re dead.’ Sybil obediently rolled over, protesting none the less that the game had only begun, while the Dobells sighed, ‘Oh, Désirée!’

Sybil vowed to herself each night, I will do the same to her. Next time — tomorrow if it isn’t raining — I will bang-bang her before she has a chance to hang her panama on the bough as a decoy. I will say bang-bang on her out of turn, and I will do her dead before her time.

But on no succeeding tomorrow did Sybil bring herself to do this. Her pride before the Dobells was more valuable than the success of the game. Instead, with her cleverness, Sybil set herself to avoid Désirée’s range for as long as possible. She dodged behind the laurels and threw out a running commentary as if to a mental defective, such as, ‘I’m in disguise, all in green, and no one can see me among the trees.’ But still Désirée saw her. Désirée’s eyes insisted on penetrating solid mountains. ‘I’m half a mile away from everyone,’ Sybil cried as Désirée’s gun swivelled relentlessly upon her.

I shall refuse to be dead, Sybil promised herself. I’ll break the rule. If it doesn’t count with her why should it count with me? I won’t roll over any more when she bangs you’re dead to me. Next time, tomorrow if it isn’t raining ...

But Sybil simply did roll over. When Join and Hugh Dobell called out to her that Désirée’s bang-bang did not count she started hopefully to resurrect herself; but ‘It does count, it does. That’s the rule,’ Désirée counter-screached. And Sybil dropped back flat, knowing utterly that this was final.

And so the girl continued to deal premature death to Sybil, losing her head, but never so much that she aimed at one of the boys. For some reason which Sybil did not consider until she was years and years older, it was always herself who had to die.

One day, when Désirée was late in arriving for play, Sybil put it to the boys that Désirée should be left out of the game in future. ‘She only spoils it.’

‘But,’ said Jon, ‘you need four people for the game.’

‘You need four,’ said Hugh.

‘No, you can do it with three.’ As she spoke she was inventing the game with three. She explained to them what was in her mind’s eye. But neither boy could grasp the idea, having got used to Bandits and Riders with two on each side. ‘I am the lone Rider, you see,’ said Sybil. ‘Or,’ she wheedled, ‘the cherry tree can be a Rider.’ She

was talking to stone, inoffensive but uncomprehending. All at once she realized, without articulating the idea, that her intelligence was superior to theirs, and she felt lonely.

‘Could we play rounders instead?’ ventured Jon.

- 5 Sybil brought a book every day after that, and sat reading beside her mother, who was glad, on the whole, that Sybil had grown tired of rowdy games.

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‘They were preparing,’ said Sybil, ‘to go on a shoot.’ Sybil’s host was changing the reel.

- 10 ‘I get quite a new vision of Sybil,’ said her hostess, ‘seeing her in such a ... such a social environment. Were any of these people intellectuals, Sybil?’

‘No, but lots of poets.’

‘Oh, no. Did they all write poetry?’

‘Quite a lot of them,’ said Sybil, ‘did.’

- 15 ‘Who were they all? Who was that blond fellow who was standing by the van with you?’

‘He was the manager of the estate. They grew passion-fruit and manufactured the juice.’

‘Passion-fruit — how killing. Did he write poetry?’

- 20 ‘Oh, yes.

‘And who was the girl, the one I thought was you?’

‘Oh, I had known her as a child and we met again in the Colony. The short man was her husband.’

- 25 ‘And were you all off on safari that morning? I simply can’t imagine you shooting anything, Sybil, somehow.’

‘On this occasion,’ said Sybil, ‘I didn’t go. I just held the gun for effect.’

Everyone laughed.

‘Do you still keep up with these people? I’ve heard that colonials are great letter-writers, it keeps them in touch with —’

5 ‘No.’ And she added, ‘Three of them are dead. The girl and her husband, and the fair fellow.’

‘Really? What happened to them? Don’t tell me they were mixed up in shooting affairs.’

‘They were mixed up in shooting affairs,’ said Sybil.

‘Oh, these colonials,’ said the elderly woman, ‘and their shooting affairs!’

10 ‘Number three,’ said Sybil’s host. ‘Ready? Lights out, please.’

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15 ‘Don’t get eaten by lions. I say, Sybil, don’t get mixed up in a shooting affair.’ The party at the railway station were unaware of the noise they were making for they were inside the noise. As the time of departure drew near Donald’s relatives tended to herd themselves apart while Sybil’s clustered round the couple.

‘Two years — it will be an interesting experience for them.’

‘Mind out for the shooting affairs. Don’t let Donald have a gun.’

20 There had been an outbreak of popular headlines about the shooting affairs in the Colony. Much had been blared forth about the effect, on the minds of young settlers, of the climate, the hard drinking, the shortage of white women. The Colony was a place where lovers shot husbands, or shot themselves, where husbands shot natives who spied through bedroom windows. Letters to The Times arrived belatedly from respectable colonists, refuting the scandals with sober statistics. The recent incidents, they said, did not represent the habits of the peaceable majority. The
25 Governor told the press that everything had been highly exaggerated. By the time Sybil and Donald left for the Colony the music-hall comics had already exhausted the entertainment value of colonial shooting affairs.

‘Don’t make pets of snakes or crocs. Mind out for the lions. Don’t forget to write.’

30 It was almost a surprise to them to find that shooting affairs in the Colony were not entirely a music-hall myth. They occurred in waves. For three months at a time the

gun-murders and suicides were reported weekly. The old colonists with their very blue eyes sat beside their whisky bottles and remarked that another young rotter had shot himself. Then the rains would break and the shootings would cease for a long season.

5 Eighteen months after their marriage Donald was mauled by a lioness and died on the long stretcher journey back to the station. He was one of a party of eight. No one could really say how it happened; it was done in a flash. The natives had lost their wits, and, instead of shooting the beast, had come calling 'Ah-ah-ah,' and pointing to the spot. A few strides, shouldering the grass aside, and Donald's friends got the
10 lioness as she reared from his body.

His friends in the archaeological team to which he belonged urged Sybil to remain in the Colony for the remaining six months, and return to England with them. Still undecided, she went on a sight-seeing tour. But before their time was up the archaeologists had been recalled. War had been declared. Civilians were not
15 permitted to leave the continent, and Sybil was caught, like Donald under the lioness.

She wished he had lived to enjoy a life of his own, as she intended to do. It was plain to her that they must have separated had he lived. There had been no disagreement but, thought Sybil, given another two years there would have been disagreements. Donald had shown signs of becoming a bore. By the last, the twenty-seventh, year of
20 his life, his mind had ceased to inquire. Archaeology, that thrilling subject, had become Donald's job, merely. He began to talk as if all archaeological methods and theories had ceased to evolve on the day he obtained his degree; it was now only a matter of applying his knowledge to field-work for a limited period. Archaeological papers came out from England. The usual crank literature on roneo foolscap followed
25 them from one postal address to another. 'Donald, aren't you going to look through them?' Sybil said, as the journals and papers piled up. 'No, really, I don't see it's necessary.' It was not necessary because his future was fixed; two years in the field and then a lectureship. If it were my subject, she thought, these papers would be necessary to me. Even the crackpot ones, rightly read, would be, to me, enlarging.

30 Sybil lay in bed in the mornings reading the translation of Kierkegaard's Journals, newly arrived from England in their first, revelatory month of publication. She felt like a desert which had not realized its own aridity till the rain began to fall upon it. When Donald came home in the late afternoons she had less and less to say to him.

'There has been another shooting affair,' Donald said, 'across the valley. The chap
35 came home unexpectedly and found his wife with another man. He shot them both.'

'In this place, one is never far from the jungle,' Sybil said.

‘What are you talking about? We are eight hundred miles from the jungle.’

When he had gone on his first big shoot, eight hundred miles away in the jungle, she had reflected, there is no sign of a living mind in him, it is like a landed fish which has ceased to palpitate. But, she thought, another woman would never notice it. Other
5 women do not wish to be married to a Mind. Yet I do, she thought, and I am a freak and should not have married. In fact I am not the marrying type. Perhaps that is why he does not explore my personality, any more than he reads the journals. It might make him think, and that would be hurtful.

10 After his death she wished he had lived to enjoy a life of his own, whatever that might have been. She took a job in a private school for girls and cultivated a few friends for diversion until the war should be over. Charming friends need not possess minds.

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15 Their motor launch was rocking up the Zambezi. Sybil was leaning over the rail mouthing something to a startled native in a canoe. Now Sybil was pointing across the river.

‘I think I was asking him,’ Sybil commented to her friends in the darkness, ‘about the hippo. There was a school of hippo some distance away, and we wanted to see them better. But the native said we shouldn’t go too near — that’s why he’s looking so frightened — because the hippo often upset a boat, and then the crocs quickly slither
20 into the water. There, look! We got a long shot of the hippo — those bumps in the water, like submarines, those are the snouts of hippo.’

The film rocked with the boat as it proceeded up the river. The screen went white.

‘Something’s happened,’ said Sybil’s hostess.

25 ‘Put on the light,’ said Sybil’s host. He fiddled with the projector and a young man, their lodger from upstairs, went to help him.

‘I loved those tiny monkeys on the island,’ said her hostess. ‘Do hurry, Ted. What’s gone wrong?’

‘Shut up a minute,’ he said.

‘Sybil, you know you haven’t changed much since you were a girl.’

30 ‘Thank you, Ella.’ I haven’t changed at all so far as I still think charming friends need not possess minds.

'I expect this will revive your memories, Sybil. The details, I mean. One is bound to forget so much.'

'Oh yes,' Sybil said, and she added, 'but I recall quite a lot of details, you know.'

'Do you really, Sybil?'

5 I wish, she thought, they wouldn't cling to my least word.

The young man turned from the projector with several feet of the film-strip looped between his widespread hands. 'Is the fair chap your husband, Mrs Greeves?' he said to Sybil.

10 'Sybil lost her husband very early on,' her hostess informed him in a low and sacred voice.

'Oh, I am sorry.'

15 Sybil's hostess replenished the drinks of her three guests. Her host turned from the projector, finished his drink, and passed his glass to be refilled, all in one movement. Everything they do seems large and important, thought Sybil, but I must not let it be so. We are only looking at old films.

She overheard a sibilant 'Whish-sh-sh?' from the elderly woman in which she discerned, 'Who is she?'

'Sybil Greeves,' her hostess breathed back, 'a distant cousin of Ted's through marriage.'

20 'Oh yes?' The low tones were puzzled as if all had not been explained. 'She's quite famous, of course.'

'Oh, I didn't know that.'

'Very few people know it,' said Sybil's hostess with a little arrogance. 'OK,' said Ted, 'lights out.'

25 'I must say,' said his wife, 'the colours are marvellous.'

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All the time she was in the Colony Sybil longed for the inexplicable colourings of her native land. The flamboyants were too rowdy, the birds, the native women with their

heads bound in cloth of piercing pink, their blinding black skin and white teeth, the baskets full of bright tough flowers or oranges on their heads, the sight of which everyone else admired ('How I wish I could paint all this!') distressed Sybil, it bored her.

- 5 She rented a house, sharing it with a girl whose husband was fighting in the north. She was twenty-two. To safeguard her privacy absolutely, she had a plywood partition put up in the sitting-room, for it was another ten years before she had learnt those arts of leading a double life and listening to people ambiguously, which enabled her to mix without losing identity, and to listen without boredom.
- 10 On the other side of the partition Ariadne Lewis decorously entertained her friends, most of whom were men on leave. On a few occasions Sybil attended these parties, working herself, as in a frenzy of self-discipline, into a state of carnal excitement over the men. She managed to do this only by an effortful sealing-off of all her critical faculties except those which assessed a good male voice and appearance. The
- 15 hangovers were frightful.

- The scarcity of white girls made it easy for any one of them to keep a number of men in perpetual attendance. Ariadne had many boyfriends but no love affairs. Sybil had three affairs in the space of two years, to put herself to the test. They started at private dances, in the magnolia-filled gardens that smelt like a scent factory, under
- 20 the Milky Way which looked like an overcrowded jeweller's window. The affairs ended when she succumbed to one of her attacks of tropical flu, and lay in a twilight of the senses on a bed which had been set on the stone stoep and overhung with a white mosquito net like something bridal. With damp shaky hands she would write a final letter to the man and give it to her half caste maid to post. He would telephone
- 25 next morning, and would be put off by the house-boy, who was quite intelligent.

- For some years she had been thinking she was not much inclined towards sex. After the third affair, this dawned and rose within her as a whole realization, as if in the past, when she had told herself, 'I am not predominantly a sexual being,' or 'I'm rather a frigid freak, I suppose, these were the sayings of an illiterate, never quite
- 30 rational and known until now, but after the third affair the notion was so intensely conceived as to be almost new. It appalled her. She lay on the shady stoep, her fever subsiding, and examined her relations with men. She thought, what if I married again? She shivered under the hot sheet. Can it be, she thought, that I have a suppressed tendency towards women? She lay still and let the idea probe round in
- 35 imagination. She surveyed, with a stony inward eye, all the women she had known, prim little academicians with cream peter-pan collars on their dresses, large dominant women, a number of beauties, conventional nitwits like Ariadne. No, really, she thought; neither men nor women. It is a not caring for sexual relations. It

is not merely a lack of pleasure in sex, it is dislike of the excitement. And it is not merely dislike, it is worse, it is boredom.

5 She felt a lonely emotion near to guilt. The three love affairs took on heroic aspects in her mind. They were an attempt, thought Sybil, to do the normal thing. Perhaps I may try again. Perhaps, if I should meet the right man ... But at the idea 'right man' she felt a sense of intolerable desolation and could not stop shivering. She raised the mosquito net and reached for the lemon juice, splashing it jerkily into the glass. She sipped. The juice had grown warm and had been made too sweet, but she let it linger on her sore throat and peered through the net at the backs of houses and the yellow
10 veldt beyond them.

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Ariadne said one morning, 'I met a girl last night, it was funny. I thought it was you at first and called over to her. But she wasn't really like you close up, it was just an impression. As a matter of fact, she knows you. I've asked her to tea. I forget her
15 name.'

'I don't,' said Sybil.

But when Désirée arrived they greeted each other with exaggerated warmth, wholly felt at the time, as acquaintances do when they meet in another hemisphere. Sybil had last seen Désirée at a dance in Hampstead, and there had merely said, 'Oh, hallo.'

20 'We were at our first school together,' Désirée explained to Ariadne, still holding Sybil's hand.

Already Sybil wished to withdraw. 'It's strange,' she remarked, 'how, sooner or later, everyone in the Colony meets someone they have known, or their parents knew, at home.'

25 Désirée and her husband, Barry Weston, were settled in a remote part of the Colony. Sybil had heard of Weston, unaware that Désirée was his wife. He was much talked of as an enterprising planter. Some years ago he had got the idea of manufacturing passion-fruit juice, had planted orchards and set up a factory. The business was now expanding wonderfully. Barry Weston also wrote poetry, a volume of which, entitled
30 Home Thoughts, he had published and sold with great success within the confines of the Colony. His first wife had died of blackwater fever. On one of his visits to England he had met and married Désirée, who was twelve years his junior.

'You must come and see us,' said Désirée to Sybil; and to Ariadne she explained again, 'We were at our first little private school together.' And she said, 'Oh, Sybil, do you

remember Trotsky? Do you remember Minnie Mouse, what a hell of a life we gave her? I shall never forget that day when ...'

5 The school where Sybil taught was shortly to break up for holidays; Ariadne was to visit her husband in Cairo at that time. Sybil promised a visit to the Westons. When Désirée, beautifully dressed in linen suiting, had departed, Ariadne said, 'I'm so glad you're going to stay with them. I hated the thought of your being all alone for the next few weeks.'

'Do you know,' Sybil said, 'I don't think I shall go to stay with them after all. I'll make an excuse.'

10 'Oh, why not? Oh, Sybil, it's such a lovely place, and it will be fun for you. He's a poet, too.' Sybil could sense exasperation, could hear Ariadne telling her friends, 'There's something wrong with Sybil. You never know a person till you live with them. Now Sybil will say one thing one minute, and the next ... Something wrong with her sex-life, perhaps ... odd ...'

15 At home, thought Sybil, it would not be such a slur. Her final appeal for a permit to travel to England had just been dismissed. The environment mauled her weakness. 'I think I'm going to have a cold,' she said, shivering.

'Go straight to bed, dear.' Ariadne called for black Elijah and bade him prepare some lemon juice. But the cold did not materialize.

20 She returned with flu, however, from her first visit to the Westons. Her 1936 Ford V8 had broken down on the road and she had waited three chilly hours before another car had appeared.

'You must get a decent car,' said the chemist's wife, who came to console her. 'These old crocks simply won't stand up to the roads out here.'

25 Sybil shivered and held her peace. Nevertheless, she returned to the Westons at mid-term.

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Désirée's invitations were pressing, almost desperate. Again and again Sybil went in obedience to them. The Westons were a magnetic field.

30 There was a routine attached to her arrival. The elegant wicker chair was always set for her in the same position on the stoep. The same cushions, it seemed, were always piled in exactly the same way.

‘What will you drink, Sybil? Are you comfy there, Sybil? We’re going to give you a wonderful time, Sybil.’ She was their little orphan, she supposed. She sat, with very dark glasses, contemplating the couple. ‘We’ve planned — haven’t we, Barry? — a surprise for you, Sybil.’

5 ‘We’ve planned — haven’t we, Désirée? — a marvellous trip ... a croc hunt ... hippo ...’

Sybil sips her gin and lime. Facing her on the wicker sofa, Désirée and her husband sit side by side. They gaze at Sybil affectionately, ‘Take off your smoked glasses, Sybil, the sun’s nearly gone.’ Sybil takes them off. The couple hold hands. They peck kisses
10 at each other, and presently, outrageously, they are entwined in a long erotic embrace in the course of which Barry once or twice regards Sybil from the corner of his eye. Barry disengages himself and sits with his arm about his wife; she snuggles up to him. Why, thinks Sybil, is this performance being staged? ‘Sybil is shocked,’ Barry remarks. She sips her drink, and reflects that a public display between man and wife
15 somehow is more shocking than are courting couples in parks and doorways. ‘We’re very much in love with each other,’ Barry explains, squeezing his wife. And Sybil wonders what is wrong with their marriage since obviously something is wrong. The couple kiss again. Am I dreaming this? Sybil asks herself.

Even on her first visit Sybil knew definitely there was something wrong with the
20 marriage. She thought of herself, at first, as an objective observer, and was even amused when she understood they had chosen her to be their sort of Victim of Expiation. On occasions when other guests were present she noted that the love scenes did not take place. Instead, the couple tended to snub Sybil before their friends. ‘Poor little Sybil, she lives all alone and is a teacher, and hasn’t many friends.
25 We have her here to stay as often as possible.’ The people would look uneasily at Sybil, and would smile. ‘But you must have heaps of friends,’ they would say politely. Sybil came to realize she was an object of the Westons’ resentment, and that, nevertheless, they found her indispensable.

Ariadne returned from Cairo. ‘You always look washed out when you’ve been staying
30 at the Westons’, she told Sybil eventually. ‘I suppose it’s due to the late parties and lots of drinks.’

‘I suppose so.

Désirée wrote continually. ‘Do come, Barry needs you. He needs your advice about some sonnets.’ Sybil tore up these letters quickly, but usually went. Not because her
35 discomfort was necessary to their wellbeing, but because it was somehow necessary to her own. The act of visiting the Westons alleviated her sense of guilt.

I believe, she thought, they must discern my abnormality. How could they have guessed? She was always cautious when they dropped questions about her private life. But one's closest secrets have a subtle way of communicating themselves to the resentful vigilance of opposite types. I do believe, she thought, that heart speaks unto heart, and deep calleth unto deep. But rarely in clear language. There is a misunderstanding here. They imagine their demonstrations of erotic bliss will torment my frigid soul, and so far they are right. But the reason for my pain is not envy. Really, it is boredom.

Her Ford V8 rattled across country. How bored, she thought, I am going to be by their married tableau! How pleased, exultant, they will be! These thoughts consoled her, they were an offering to the gods.

'Are you comfy, Sybil?'

She sipped her gin and lime. 'Yes, thanks.'

His pet name for Désirée was Dearie. 'Kiss me, Dearie,' he said.

'There, Baddy,' his wife said to Barry, snuggling close to him and squinting at Sybil.

'I say, Sybil,' Barry said as he smoothed down his hair, 'you ought to get married again. You're missing such a lot.'

'Yes, Sybil,' said Désirée, 'you should either marry or enter a convent, one or the other.'

'I don't see why,' Sybil said, 'I should fit into a tidy category.'

'Well, you're neither one thing nor another — is she, honeybunch?'

True enough, thought Sybil, and that is why I'm laid out on the altar of boredom.

'Or get yourself a boyfriend,' said Désirée. 'It would be good for you.'

'You're wasting your best years,' said Barry.

'Are you comfy there, Sybil? ... We want you to enjoy yourself here. Any time you want to bring a boyfriend, we're broadminded — aren't we, Baddy?'

'Kiss me, Dearie,' he said.

Désirée took his handkerchief from his pocket and rubbed lipstick from his mouth. He jerked his head away and said to Sybil, 'Pass your glass.'

5 Désirée looked at her reflection in the glass of the french windows and said, 'Sybil's too intellectual, that's her trouble.' She patted her hair, then looked at Sybil with an old childish enmity.

After dinner Barry would read his poems. Usually, he said, 'I'm not going to be an egotist tonight. I'm not going to read my poems.' And usually Désirée would cry, 'Oh do, Barry, do.' Always, eventually, he did. 'Marvellous,' Désirée would comment, 'wonderful.' By the third night of her visits, the farcical aspect of it all would lose its
10 fascination for Sybil, and boredom would fill her near to bursting point, like gas in a balloon. To relieve the strain, she would sigh deeply from time to time. Barry was too engrossed in his own voice to notice this, but Désirée was watching. At first Sybil worded her comments tactfully. 'I think you should devote more of your time to your verses,' she said. And, since he looked puzzled, added, 'You owe it to poetry if you
15 write it.'

'Nonsense,' said Désirée, 'he often writes a marvellous sonnet before shaving in the morning.'

'Sybil may be right,' said Barry. 'I owe poetry all the time I can give.'

'Are you tired, Sybil?' said Désirée. 'Why are you sighing like that; are you all right?'

20 Later, Sybil gave up the struggle and wearily said, 'Very good,' or 'Nice rhythm' after each poem. And even the guilt of condoning Désirée's 'marvellous ... wonderful' was less than the guilt of her isolated mind. She did not know then that the price of allowing false opinions was the gradual loss of one's capacity for forming true ones.

Not every morning, but at least twice during each visit Sybil would wake to hear the
25 row in progress. The nanny, who brought her early tea, made large eyes and tiptoed warily. Sybil would have her bath, splashing a lot to drown the noise of the quarrel. Downstairs, the battle of voices descended, filled every room and corridor. When, on the worst occasions, the sound of shattering glass broke through the storm, Sybil would know that Barry was smashing up Désirée's dressing-table; and would wonder
30 how Désirée always managed to replace her crystal bowls, since goods of that type were now scarce, and why she bothered to do so. Sybil would always find the two girls of Barry's former marriage standing side by side on the lawn frankly gazing up at the violent bedroom window. The nanny would cart off Désirée's baby for a far-away walk. Sybil would likewise disappear for the morning.

35 The first time this happened, Désirée told her later, 'I'm afraid you unsettle Barry.'

‘What do you mean?’ said Sybil.

Désirée dabbed her watery eyes and blew her nose. ‘Well, of course, it stands to reason, Sybil, you’re out to attract Barry. And he’s only a man. I know you do it unconsciously, but ...’

- 5 ‘I can’t stand this sort of thing. I shall leave right away,’ Sybil said. ‘No, Sybil, no. Don’t make a thing of it. Barry needs you. You’re the only person in the Colony who can really talk to him about his poetry.’

‘Understand,’ said Sybil on that first occasion, ‘I am not at all interested in your husband. I think he’s an all-round third-rater. That is my opinion.’

- 10 Désirée looked savage. ‘Barry,’ she shouted, ‘has made a fortune out of passion-fruit juice in eight years. He has sold four thousand copies of Home Thoughts on his own initiative.’

- 15 It was like a game for three players. According to the rules, she was to be in love, unconsciously, with Barry, and tortured by the contemplation of Désirée’s married bliss. She felt too old to join in, just at that moment.

Barry came to her room while she was packing. ‘Don’t go,’ he said. ‘We need you. And after all, we are only human. What’s a row? These quarrels only happen in the best marriages. And I can’t for the life of me think how it started.’

* * * * *

- 20 ‘What a beautiful house. What a magnificent estate,’ said Sybil’s hostess.

‘Yes,’ said Sybil, ‘it was the grandest in the Colony.’

‘Were the owners frightfully grand?’

‘Well, they were rich, of course.’

- 25 ‘I can see that. What a beautiful interior. I adore those lovely old oil lamps. I suppose you didn’t have electricity?’

‘Yes, there was electric light in all the rooms. But my friends preferred the oil-lamp tradition for the dining-room. You see, it was a copy of an old Dutch house.’

‘Absolutely charming.’

The reel came to an end. The lights went up and everyone shifted in their chairs.

‘What were those large red flowers?’ said the elderly lady.

‘Flamboyants.’

‘Magnificent,’ said her hostess. ‘Don’t you miss the colours, Sybil?’

5 ‘No, I don’t, actually. There was too much of it for me.

‘You didn’t care for the bright colours?’ said the young man, leaning forward eagerly.

Sybil smiled at him.

‘I liked the bit where those little lizards were playing among the stones. That was an excellent shot,’ said her host. He was adjusting the last spool.

10 ‘I rather liked that handsome blond fellow,’ said her hostess, as if the point had been in debate. ‘Was he the passion-fruiter?’

‘He was the manager,’ said Sybil.

‘Oh yes, you told me. He was in a shooting affair, did you say?’

‘Yes, it was unfortunate.

15 ‘Poor young man. It sounds quite a dangerous place. I suppose the sun and everything ...’

‘It was dangerous for some people. It depended.’

‘The blacks look happy enough. Did you have any trouble with them in those days?’

‘No,’ said Sybil, ‘only with the whites.’ Everyone laughed.

20 ‘Right,’ said her host. ‘Lights out, please.’

* * * * *

Sybil soon perceived the real cause of the Westons’ quarrels. It differed from their explanations: they were both, they said, so much in love, so jealous of each other’s relations with the opposite sex.

‘Barry was furious,’ said Désirée one day, ‘— weren’t you, Barry? —because I smiled, merely smiled, at Carter.’

‘I’ll have it out with Carter,’ muttered Barry. ‘He’s always hanging round Désirée.’

5 David Carter was their manager. Sybil was so foolish as once to say, ‘Oh surely David wouldn’t—’

‘Oh wouldn’t he?’ said Désirée.

‘Oh wouldn’t he?’ said Barry.

Possibly they did not themselves know the real cause of their quarrels. These occurred on mornings when Barry had decided to lounge in bed and write poetry.
10 Désirée, anxious that the passion-fruit business should continue to expand, longed for him to be at his office in the factory at eight o’clock each morning, by which time all other enterprising men in the Colony were at work. But Barry spoke more and more of retiring and devoting his time to his poems. When he lay abed, pen in hand, worrying a sonnet, Désirée would sulk and bang doors. The household knew that the
15 row was on. ‘Quiet! Don’t you see I’m trying to think,’ he would shout. ‘I suggest,’ she would reply, ‘you go to the library if you want to write.’ It was evident that her greed and his vanity, facing each other in growling antipathy, were too terrible for either to face. Instead, the names of David Carter and Sybil would fly between them, consoling them, peppering-up and propagating the myth of their mutual attraction.

20 ‘Rolling your eyes at Carter in the orchard. Don’t think I didn’t notice.’

‘Carter? That’s funny. I can easily keep Carter in his place. But while we’re on the subject, what about you with Sybil? You sat up late enough with her last night after I’d gone to bed.’

25 Sometimes he not only smashed the crystal bowls, he hurled them through the window.

In the exhausted afternoon Barry would explain, ‘Désirée was upset —weren’t you, Désirée? — because of you, Sybil. It’s understandable. We shouldn’t stay up late talking after Désirée has gone to bed. You’re a little devil in your way, Sybil.’

‘Oh well,’ said Sybil obligingly, ‘that’s how it is.’

30 She became tired of the game. When, in the evenings, Barry’s voice boomed forth with sonorous significance as befits a hallowed subject, she no longer thought of herself as an objective observer. She had tired of the game because she was now more

than nominally committed to it. She ceased to be bored by the Westons; she began to hate them.

5 'What I don't understand,' said Barry, 'is why my poems are ignored back in England. I've sold over four thousand of the book out here. Feature articles about me have appeared in all the papers out here; remind me to show you them. But I can't get a single notice in London. When I send a poem to any of the magazines I don't even get a reply.'

'They are engaged in a war,' Sybil said.

10 'But they still publish poetry. Poetry so-called. Utter rubbish, all of it. You can't understand the stuff.'

'Yours is too good for them,' said Sybil. To a delicate ear her tone might have resembled the stab of a pin stuck into a waxen image.

'That's a fact, between ourselves,' said Barry. 'I shouldn't say it, but that's the answer.'

15 * * * * *

Barry was overweight, square and dark. His face had lines, as of anxiety or stomach trouble. David Carter, when he passed, cool and fair through the house, was quite a change.

'England is finished,' said Barry. 'It's degenerate.'

20 'I wonder,' said Sybil, 'you have the heart to go on writing so cheerily about the English towns and countryside.' Now, now, Sybil, she thought; business is business, and the nostalgic English scene is what the colonists want. This visit must be my last. I shall not come again.

25 'Ah, that,' Barry was saying, 'was the England I remember. The good old country. But now, I'm afraid, it's decadent. After the war it will be no more than ...'

Désirée would have the servants into the drawing-room every morning to give them their orders for the day. 'I believe in keeping up home standards,' said Désirée, whose parents were hotel managers. Sybil was not sure where Désirée had got the idea of herding all the domestics into her presence each morning. Perhaps it was some family-prayer assembly in her ancestral memory, or possibly it had been some hotel-staff custom which prompted her to 'have in the servants' and instruct them beyond
30 their capacity. These half-domesticated peasants and erstwhile smallfarmers stood,

5 bare-footed and woolly-cropped, in clumsy postures on Désirée's carpet. In pidgin dialect which they largely failed to comprehend, she enunciated the duties of each one. Only Sybil and David Carter knew that the natives' name for Désirée was, translated, 'Bad Hen'. Désirée complained much about their stupidity, but she enjoyed this morning palaver as Barry relished his poetry.

'Carter writes poetry too,' said Barry with a laugh one day.

Désirée shrieked. 'Poetry! Oh, Barry, you can't call that stuff poetry.'

'It is frightful,' Barry said, 'but the poor fellow doesn't know it.'

'I should like to see it,' Sybil said.

10 'You aren't interested in Carter by any chance, Sybil?' said Désirée.

'How do you mean?'

'Personally, I mean.'

'Well, I think he's all right.'

15 'Be honest, Sybil,' said Barry. Sybil felt extremely irritated. He so often appealed for frankness in others, as if by right; was so dishonest with himself 'Be honest, Sybil — you're after David Carter.'

'He's handsome,' Sybil said.

'You haven't a chance,' said Barry. 'He's mad keen on Désirée. And anyway, Sybil, you don't want a beginner.'

20 'You want a mature man in a good position,' said Désirée. 'The life you're living isn't natural for a girl. I've been noticing,' she said, 'you and Carter being matey together out on the farm.'

25 Towards the end of her stay David Carter produced his verses for Sybil to read. She thought them interesting but unpractised. She told him so, and was disappointed that he did not take this as a reasonable criticism. He was very angry. 'Of course,' she said, 'your poetry is far better than Barry's.' This failed to appease David. After a while, when she was meeting him in the town where she lived, she began to praise his poems, persuading herself that he was fairly talented.

She met him whenever he could get away. She sent excuses in answer to Désirée's pressing invitations. For different reasons, both Sybil and David were anxious to keep their meetings secret from the Westons. Sybil did not want the affair mythologized and gossiped about. For David's part, he valued his job in the flourishing passion-fruit concern. He had confided to Sybil his hope, one day, to have the whole business under his control. He might even buy Barry out. 'I know far more about it than he does. He's getting more and more bound up with his poetry, and paying next to no attention to the business. I'm just waiting.' He is, Sybil remarked to herself on hearing this, a true poet all right.

David reported that the quarrels between Désirée and Barry were becoming more violent, that the possibility of Barry's resigning from business to devote his time to poetry was haunting Désirée. 'Why don't you come, Désirée wrote, 'and talk to Barry about his poetry? Why don't you come and see us now? What have we done? Poor Sybil, all alone in the world, you ought to be married. David Carter follows me all over the place, it's most embarrassing, you know how furious Barry gets. Well, I suppose that's the cost of having a devoted husband.' Perhaps, thought Sybil, she senses that David is my lover.

One day she went down with flu. David turned up unexpectedly and proposed marriage. He clung to her with violent, large hands. She alone, he said, understood his ambitions, his art, himself. Within a year or two they could, together, take over the passion-fruit plantation.

'Sh-sh, Ariadne will hear you.' Ariadne was out, in fact. David looked at her somewhat wildly. 'We must be married,' he said.

Sybil's affair with David Carter was over, from her point of view, almost before it had started. She had engaged in it as an act of virtue done against the grain, and for a brief time it had absolved her from the reproach of her sexlessness.

'I'm waiting for an answer.' By his tone, he seemed to suspect what the answer would be.

'Oh, David, I was just about to write to you. We really must put an end to this. As for marriage, well, I'm not cut out for it at all.'

He stooped over her bed and clung to her. 'You'll catch my flu,' she said. 'I'll think about it,' she said, to get rid of him.

When he had gone she wrote him her letter, sipping lemon juice to ease her throat. She noticed he had brought for her, and left on the floor of the stoep, six bottles of

Weston's Passion-fruit Juice. He will soon get over the affair, she thought, he has still got his obsession with the passion-fruit business.

But in response to her letter David forced his way into the house. Sybil was alarmed. None of her previous lovers had persisted in this way.

5 'It's your duty to marry me.

'Really, what next?'

'It's your duty to me as a man and a poet.' She did not like his eyes.

'As a poet,' she said, 'I think you're a third-rater.' She felt relieved to hear her own voice uttering the words.

10 He stiffened up in a comical melodramatic style, looking such a clean-cut settler with his golden hair and tropical suiting.

15 'David Carter,' wrote Désirée, 'has gone on the bottle. I think he's bats, myself. It's because I keep giving him the brush-off. Isn't it all silly? The estate will go to ruin if Barry doesn't get rid of him. Barry has sent him away on leave for a month, but if he hasn't improved on his return we shall have to make a change. When are you coming? Barry needs to talk to you.'

Sybil went the following week, urged on by her old self-despising; driving her Ford V8 against the current of pleasure, yet compelled to expiate her abnormal nature by contact with the Westons' sexuality, which she knew, none the less, would bore her.

20 They twisted the knife within, an hour of her arrival.

'Haven't you found a man yet?' said Barry.

You ought to try a love affair,' said Désirée. 'We've been saying —haven't we, Barry? — you ought to, Sybil. It would be good for you. It isn't healthy, the life you lead. That's why you get flu so often. It's psychological.'

25 'Come out on the lawn,' Barry had said when she first arrived. 'We've got the ciné camera out. Come and be filmed.'

Désirée said, 'Carter came back this morning.'

'Oh, is he here? I thought he was away for a month.'

‘So did we. But he turned up this morning.’

‘He’s moping,’ Barry said, ‘about Désirée. She snubs him so badly.’

‘He’s psychological,’ said Désirée.

* * * * *

5 ‘I love that striped awning,’ said Sybil’s hostess. ‘It puts the finishing touch on the whole scene. How carefree you all look — don’t they, Ted?’

‘That chap looks miserable,’ Ted observed. He referred to a shot of David Carter who had just ambled within range of the camera.

Everyone laughed, for David looked exceedingly grim.

10 ‘He was caught in an off-moment there,’ said Sybil’s hostess. ‘Oh, there goes Sybil. I thought you looked a little sad just then, Sybil. There’s that other girl again, and the lovely dog.’

‘Was this a typical afternoon in the Colony?’ inquired the young man. ‘It was and it wasn’t,’ Sybil said.

15 * * * * *

Whenever they had the camera out life changed at the Westons’. Everyone, including the children, had to look very happy. The house natives were arranged to appear in the background wearing their best whites. Sometimes Barry would have everyone dancing in a ring with the children, and the natives had to clap time.

20 Or, as on the last occasion, he would stage an effect of gracious living. The head cook-boy, who had a good knowledge of photography, was placed at his post.

‘Ready,’ said Barry to the cook, ‘shoot.’

Désirée came out, followed by the dog.

‘Look frisky, Barker,’ said Barry. The Alsatian looked frisky.

25 Barry put one arm round Désirée and his other arm through Sybil’s that late afternoon, walking them slowly across the camera range. He chatted with amiability and with an actor’s lift of the head. He would accentuate his laughter, tossing back his head. A sound track would, however, have reproduced the words, ‘Smile, Sybil.

Walk slowly. Look as if you're enjoying it. You'll be able to see yourself in later years, having the time of your life.'

Sybil giggled.

5 Just then David was seen to be securing the little lake boat between the trees. 'He must have come across the lake,' said Barry. 'I wonder if he's been drinking again?'

But David's walk was quite steady. He did not realize he was being photographed as he crossed the long lawn. He stood for a moment staring at Sybil. She said, 'Oh halo, David.' He turned and walked aimlessly face-on towards the camera.

'Hold it a minute,' Barry called out to the cook.

10 The boy obeyed at the moment David realized he had been filmed.

'OK,' shouted Barry, when David was out of range. 'Fire ahead.'

It was then Barry said to Sybil, 'Haven't you found a man yet...?' and Désirée said, 'You ought to try a love affair ...'

'We've made Sybil unhappy,' said Désirée. 'Oh, I'm quite happy.'

15 'Well, cheer up in front of the camera,' said Barry.

* * * * *

20 The sun was setting fast, the camera was folded away, and everyone had gone to change. Sybil came down and sat on the stoep outside the open french windows of the dining-room. Presently, Désirée was indoors behind her, adjusting the oil lamps which one of the house-boys had set too high. Désirée put her head round the glass door and remarked to Sybil, 'That Benjamin's a fool, I shall speak to him in the morning. He simply will not take care with these lamps. One day we'll have a real smoke-out.'

Sybil said, 'Oh, I expect they are all so used to electricity these days ...'

25 'That's the trouble,' said Désirée, and turned back into the room.

Sybil was feeling disturbed by David's presence in the place. She wondered if he would come in to dinner. Thinking of his sullen staring at her on the lawn, she felt he might make a scene. She heard a gasp from the dining-room behind her.

She looked round, but in the same second it was over. A deafening crack from the pistol and Désirée crumpled up. A movement by the inner door and David held the gun to his head. Sybil screamed, and was aware of running footsteps upstairs. The gun exploded again and David's body dropped sideways.

- 5 With Barry and the natives she went round to the dining-room. Désirée was dead. David lingered a moment enough to roll his eyes in Sybil's direction as she rose from Désirée's body. He knows, thought Sybil quite lucidly, that he got the wrong woman.

* * * * *

- 10 'What I can't understand,' said Barry when he called on Sybil a few weeks later, 'is why he did it.'

'He was mad,' said Sybil.

'Not all that mad,' said Barry. 'And everyone thinks, of course, that there was an affair between them. That's what I can't bear.'

- 15 'Quite,' said Sybil. 'But of course he was keen on Désirée. You always said so. Those rows you used to have ... You always made out you were jealous of David.'

'Do you know,' he said, 'I wasn't, really. It was a sort of... a sort of...'

'Play-act,' said Sybil.

- 20 'Sort of. You see, there was nothing between them,' he said. 'And honestly, Carter wasn't a bit interested in Désirée. And the question is why he did it. I can't bear people to think ...'

The damage to his pride, Sybil saw, outweighed his grief. The sun was setting and she rose to put on the stoep light.

'Stop!' he said. 'Turn round. My God, you did look like Désirée for a moment.'

'You're nervy,' she said, and switched on the light.

- 25 'In some ways you do look a little like Désirée,' he said. 'In some lights,' he said reflectively.

I must say something, thought Sybil, to blot this notion from his mind. I must make this occasion unmemorable, distasteful to him.

‘At all events,’ she said, ‘you’ve still got your poetry.’

‘That’s the great thing,’ he said, ‘I’ve still got that. It means everything to me, a great consolation. I’m selling up the estate and joining up. The kids are going into a convent and I’m going up north. What we need is some good war poetry. There
5 hasn’t been any war poetry.’

‘You’ll make a better soldier,’ she said, ‘than a poet.’

‘What do you say?’

She repeated her words fairly slowly, and with a sense of relief, almost of absolution. The season of falsity had formed a scab, soon to fall away altogether. There is no
10 health, she thought, for me, outside of honesty.

‘You’ve always,’ he said, ‘thought my poetry was wonderful.’

‘I have said so,’ she said, ‘but it was a sort of play-act. Of course, it’s only my opinion, but I think you’re a third-rater poet.’

‘You’re upset, my dear,’ he said.

15 He sent her the four reels of film from Cairo a month before he was killed in action. ‘It will be nice in later years,’ he wrote, ‘for you to recall those good times we used to have.’

* * * * *

20 ‘It has been delightful,’ said her hostess. ‘You haven’t changed a bit. Do you feel any different?’

‘Well yes, I feel rather differently about everything, of course.’ One learns to accept oneself.

‘A hundred feet of one’s past life!’ said the young man. ‘If they were mine, I’m sure I should be shattered. I should be calling “Lights! Lights!” like Hamlet’s uncle.’

25 Sybil smiled at him. He looked back, suddenly solemn and shrewd. ‘How tragic, those people being killed in shooting affairs,’ said the elderly woman.

‘The last reel was the best,’ said her hostess. ‘The garden was entrancing. I should like to see that one again; what about you, Ted?’

‘Yes, I liked those nature-study shots. I feel I missed a lot of it,’ said her husband.

‘Hark at him — nature-study shots!’

‘Well, those close-ups of tropical plants.

Everyone wanted the last one again.

5 ‘How about you, Sybil?’

Am I a woman, she thought calmly, or an intellectual monster? She was so accustomed to this question within herself that it needed no answer. She said, ‘Yes, I should like to see it again. It’s an interesting experience.’