

## The Dinner Party

MONA GARDNER



The country is India. A colonial official and his wife are giving a large dinner party. They are seated with their guests—army officers and government attachés and their wives, and a visiting American naturalist—in their spacious dining room, which has a bare marble floor, open rafters, and wide glass doors opening onto a veranda.

A spirited discussion springs up between a young girl who insists that women have outgrown the jumping-on-a-chair-at-the-sight-of-amouse era and a colonel who says that they haven't. "A woman's unflinching reaction in any crisis," the colonel says, "is to scream. And while a man may feel like it, he has that ounce more of nerve control than a woman has. And that last ounce is what counts."

The American does not join in the argument but watches the other guests. As he looks, he sees a strange expression come over the face of the hostess. She is staring straight ahead, her muscles contracting slightly. With a slight gesture she summons the servant standing behind her chair and whispers to him. The servant's eyes widen, and he quickly leaves the room.

Of the guests, none except the American notices this or sees the servant place a bowl of milk on the veranda just outside the open doors. The American comes to with a start. In India, milk in a bowl means only one thing—bait for a snake. He realizes there must be a cobra in the room. He looks up at the rafters—the likeliest place—but they are bare. Three corners of the room are empty, and in the fourth the servants are waiting to serve the next course. There is only one place left—under the table.

His first impulse is to jump back and warn the others, but he knows the commotion would frighten the cobra into striking. He speaks quickly, the tone of his voice so arresting that it sobers everyone. "I want to know just what control everyone at this table has. I will count three hundred—that's five minutes—and not one of you is to move a muscle. Those who move will forfeit fifty rupees. Ready!" The twenty people sit like stone images while he counts. He is saying "... two hundred and eighty ..." when, out of the corner of his eye, he sees the cobra emerge and make for the bowl of milk.

Screams ring out as he jumps to slam the veranda doors safely shut. "You were right, Colonel!" the host exclaims. "A man has just shown us an example of perfect control." "Just a minute," the American says, turning to his hostess. "Mrs. Wynnes, how did you know that cobra was in the room?" A faint smile lights up the woman's face as she replies: "Because it was crawling across my foot."

Vocabulary – write the definition for each word. (1 mark each)

1. attaches

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2. forfeit

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3. rupees

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Comprehension – Answer the following questions in COMPLETE sentences!!

1. When and where is the story set? Provide evidence. (2 marks)

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2. What is the Colonel's claim about women? (1 mark)

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3. What is irony? (1 mark)

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4. What is the irony of the story? Explain (2 marks)

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5. What is the conflict? Explain (2 marks)

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