

KEW GARDENS

Kew Gardens

VIRGINIA WOOLF



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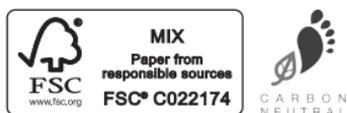
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KEW GARDENS

FROM THE OVAL-SHAPED flowerbed there rose perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves halfway up and unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the surface; and from the red, blue or yellow gloom of the throat emerged a straight bar, rough with gold dust and slightly clubbed at the end. The petals were voluminous enough to be stirred by the summer breeze, and when they moved, the red, blue and yellow lights passed one over the other, staining an inch of the brown earth beneath with a spot of the most intricate colour.

The light fell either upon the smooth, grey back of a pebble or the shell of a snail with its brown, circular veins, or, falling into a raindrop, it expanded with such intensity of red, blue and yellow the thin walls of water that one expected them to burst and disappear. Instead, the drop was left in a second silver-grey once more, and the light now settled upon the flesh of a leaf, revealing the branching thread of fibre beneath the surface, and again it moved on and spread its illumination in the vast green spaces beneath the dome of the heart-shaped and tongue-shaped leaves. Then the breeze stirred rather more briskly overhead and the colour was flashed into the air above, into the eyes of the men and women who walk in Kew Gardens in July.

The figures of these men and women straggled past the flower-bed with a curiously irregular movement not unlike that of

the white and blue butterflies who crossed the turf in zigzag flights from bed to bed. The man was about six inches in front of the woman, strolling carelessly, while she bore on with greater purpose, only turning her head now and then to see that the children were not too far behind. The man kept this distance in front of the woman purposely, though perhaps unconsciously, for he wished to go on with his thoughts.

‘Fifteen years ago I came here with Lily,’ he thought. ‘We sat somewhere over there by a lake, and I begged her to marry me all through the hot afternoon. How the dragonfly kept circling round us; how clearly I see the dragonfly and her shoe with the square silver buckle at the toe. All the time I spoke I saw her shoe, and when it moved impatiently I knew without looking up what she was going to say: the whole of her seemed to be in her

shoe. And my love, my desire, were in the dragonfly; for some reason I thought that if it settled there, on that leaf – the broad one with the red flower in the middle of it – if the dragonfly settled on the leaf she would say ‘Yes’ at once. But the dragonfly went round and round: it never settled anywhere – of course not – happily not, or I shouldn’t be walking here with Eleanor and the children – tell me, Eleanor, d’you ever think of the past?’

‘Why do you ask, Simon?’

‘Because I’ve been thinking of the past. I’ve been thinking of Lily – the woman I might have married... Well, why are you silent? Do you mind my thinking of the past?’

‘Why should I mind, Simon? Doesn’t one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees? Aren’t they one’s past, all that remains of it, those men and women, those ghosts ly-

ing under the trees... one's happiness, one's reality?'

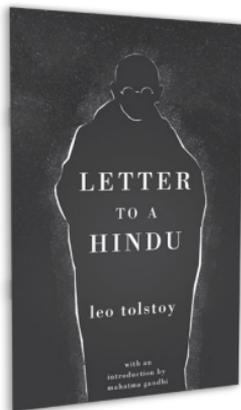
'For me, a square silver shoe buckle and a dragonfly—'

'For me, a kiss. Imagine six little girls sitting before their easels twenty years ago, down by the side of a lake, painting the water-lilies – the first red water-lilies I'd ever seen. And suddenly a kiss, there on the back of my neck. And my hand shook all the afternoon so that I couldn't paint. I took out my watch and marked the hour when I would allow myself to think of the kiss for five minutes only – it was so precious – the kiss of an old grey-haired woman with a wart on her nose, the mother of all my kisses all my life. Come, Caroline; come, Hubert.'

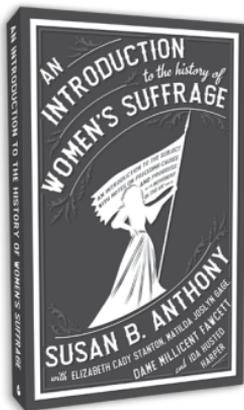
They walked on past the flower-bed, now walking four abreast, and soon diminished in size among the trees and looked half



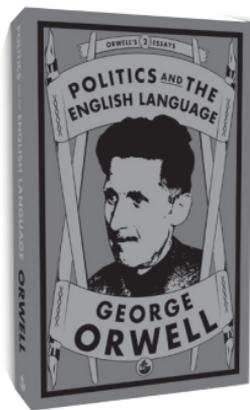
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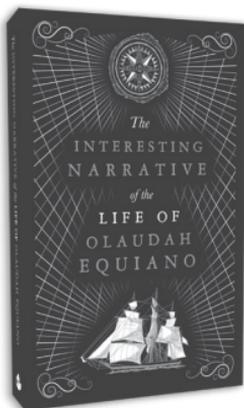
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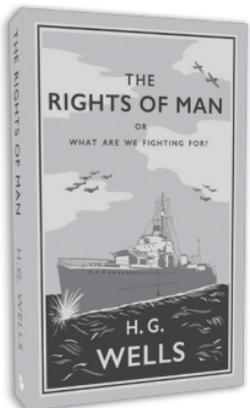
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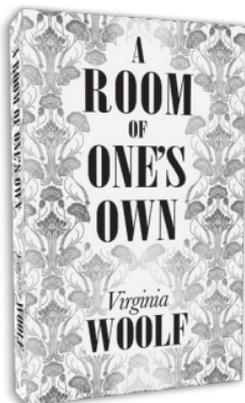
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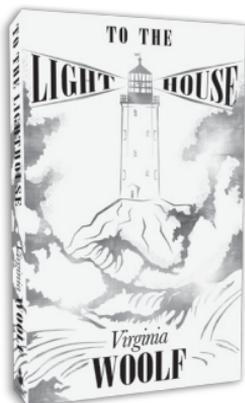
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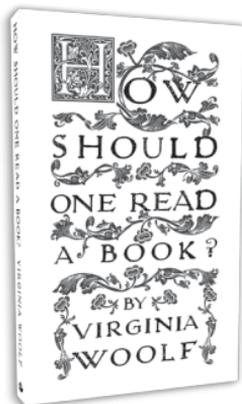


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