



The Garden of Eden

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Having recently married Catherine Hill and published a second successful novel, David Bourne and his bride travel along the southern coast of France for their honeymoon. Theirs should be an idyllic life, for they are deeply in love, he is talented and recognized, she beautiful and rich.

Yet she is also jealous of David's writing, which she regards as his mistress, and she is envious of his being a man. At first her fantasies about being a man are limited to the bedroom. Soon, though, she has her hair cut short so she will look more masculine, she has a tailor make pants for her, and she starts to call David "girl." Later, she even picks up a girl, Marita. Catherine allows David to sleep with Marita but has a brief lesbian affair with her first.

Marita is more sensitive to David's needs than the selfish Catherine and more appreciative of his writing. In a fit of jealousy, Catherine burns David's notebooks, which contain his new stories, then goes off to arrange for the publication of his unfinished autobiographical novel that treats their life together. As the work ends, David is living with Marita and, with her encouragement, is rewriting the lost stories.

In places, Hemingway's novel works well. The excerpts from David's fictionalized account of elephant hunting in Africa before World War I are powerful. The detailed description of bicycle riding (chapter 15) is vintage Hemingway. The comments on the writer's craft, though largely drawn from his other works, ring true.

Obviously, though, the work is unfinished. For example, Colonel John Boyle was clearly designed to be another of Hemingway's "code" heroes, a man who knows how to live and tries to educate others. He remains undeveloped here, appearing in only one brief scene. The style, too, is unpolished, in many places almost a parody of the Hemingway trademark: the simple, declarative sentence with its "good" and "fine" and "true".

Still, the publication of this book does let readers see a different Hemingway, one who understood the strains of being a woman in a male-dominated world, who could present a convincingly happy ending for his hero, who could even express reservations about big-game hunting. Even if it were more flawed than it is, THE GARDEN OF EDEN would be an important book.

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