

# The Dinner Party

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## Summary

**Setting:** British India, before 1947

An American naturalist is a guest at a dinner party in colonial India. He and other guests have a lively discussion about whether women have as much “nerve control” as men. A young woman insists that they do, but the men agree that women always scream when they are frightened. The naturalist notices that the hostess has become very tense. She whispers to a servant, who then puts a bowl of milk on the porch outside the dining room doors. Knowing that milk is bait for a snake, the naturalist concludes that there is a cobra in the room—but where? To prevent panic, he challenges everyone to remain perfectly still as he counts to 300. Before he can finish counting, the cobra slithers across the room toward the milk on the porch. Quickly the naturalist jumps up and shuts the door as several people scream in panic. The question of nerve control is answered when the hostess calmly reveals how she knew to request the bait for the snake. During this entire time, the cobra had been lying on her foot.