



The Far Cry

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Teresa's elderly, willful father drags her off to India to spare her from the clutches of her mother.

The Far Cry Details

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Author : Emma Smith

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From Reader Review The Far Cry for online ebook

MyGoodBookshelf says

I have reviewed this novel here: <http://mygoodbookshelf.wordpress.com/...>

Dorcas says

This book was first published in 1949 and resurrected by Persephone books. Yay! It really is a little gem and I'm so glad its back in circulation.

In a nutshell, 14 year old Teresa is dragged off to India by her father so that his exwife can't have her (though if the truth be known, neither of them want her anyway). At its crux, this is a story of a dysfunctional family and at times no character is very likeable, although we can understand why they act the way they do.

I cant say the novel is a cheerful one but its not a depressing read either. (for those who need a HEA you can rest assured that it does end with hope). Its largely character driven rather than plot driven and in this case India itself is one of the characters. I would call it slice of life.

The author was so observant of personality, foibles, mannerisms, culture and scenery (see my updates for examples of this) that I'm left feeling satisfied and slightly awed.

Why not 5 stars?

I would have liked just a little more sunshine in this child's life. Still, it's a story that stays with you long after the final pages are turned and so, for its masterful storytelling alone, I feel that it deserves at least 4 stars.

CONTENT:

SEX: None

VIOLENCE: None

PROFANITY: Very mild

MY RATING: G

Helena says

eg likte denne mykje meir enn eg hadde trudd, 4.5

Rebecca says

Despite all the critics who say how developed, how sophisticated this book is, I just found it quite... basic? amaturish? naive? I felt it simply was trying too hard. I also felt that there were two very separate parts to the novel- one was a development/constant description of the characters thoughts and feeling (more complaints about this later) and woven (not very well) between these descriptions were whole passages about Indian activities that seemed simply lifted from the travel diaries Smith says she kept. The two components didn't

seem to be merged at all well!

And now my thoughts on the characters themselves- I found them pretty two dimensional, especially the 'baddy'/pompous git Mr Digby. Teresa was a pretty clear Mary Sue (despite not really being liked by many people, apart from those who could see how pure and simply charming she was.) I felt really sorry for Ruth, who Smith seemed to set up as a counterpoint to Teresa's 'genuiness,' making her shallow and false... she was actually the character I connected most with and who I wanted to learn more about, but there was no chance for learning what she was like, only for being told by Smith/the narrator, who was very, very annoyingly omniscient and insisted on telling what every single person thought at a given time... I also ended up feeling that Ruth was betrayed by the author, she had a lightning moment of clarity and love- then bam, no more chance of that (I won't say any more so I won't spoil it).

So basically, this book and I didn't gel! But despite that it was still an OK read, even if part of the reason for that was me being to complain about it and pin point what I thought was wrong a lot!

I'm wavering between 2 & 3 stars, I'll think about it!

Jane says

In September 1946 23-year-old Emma Smith set sail for India, to work as an assistant with a documentary unit making films about tea gardens in Assam. She was dazzled by India ...

'I went down the gangplank at Bombay, and India burst upon me with the force of an explosion.'

... and she wrote down as much as she could about her experiences because she so wanted to pin down the wonder of it all.

A few years later she would use what she remembered and what she wrote as the foundation for a wonderful, wonderful novel that would go on to win the James Tate Black Award for 1949

'The Far Cry' tells the story of 14-year old Teresa Digby. She's an introspective and rather awkward child, and I think it's fair to say that she is what her circumstances made her. When her parents' marriage broke down her mother left her to go to America and her father left her for his sister to bring up. Teresa's aunt wasn't unkind, she was bringing her up as well as she could, but she lacked warmth and she lacked empathy.

When he learned that his wife was returning to England, and that she wanted to see her daughter, Mr Digby decided that he would take her to India, to visit his daughter from an earlier marriage, who was married to a tea planter. It wasn't that he was interested in his daughter, it was just that he didn't want his wife to have her.

He was a self-absorbed, dull-witted man who could never be the man he wanted to be or have the roles in life he wanted to play, but who would never acknowledge that, even to himself.

It's telling that he remains Mr Digby from his first appearance to his last,

His sister knew his weaknesses, knew what he was lacking, but she believed that she had played her part and it was time for him to play his.

"He polished off this diplomacy and his visit with a kiss that landed haphazard on the nearest part of her face, and so left. Such kisses are interesting. For it might be thought that lips which had once, so many years before given off those dark flames of roses must always at a touch bestow a scent, the merest whiff, a pot-

pourri of passion. But no, nothing like it."

The relationship between between father and daughter is awkward, they are uncomfortable with each other. They don't know each other, they don't particularly want to know each other. He disdained her awkwardness as she dealt with so much that was unfamiliar - getting in and out of taxis, eating in restaurants, holding on to things like gloves and tickets - but she struggled through, and she came to realise that in attaching so much importance to such things and in not understanding how new and strange things must be for her it was her father who was lacking.

"Teresa, who had watched defeat and then recovery first line and then illuminate his face, observed the breach in his armour: he was old, and therefore weak. And she was young, with her strength growing. Age shook him as fiercely as he had yesterday shaken her in the street. Thoughtfully she ate her breakfast. That she had seen his weakness and was bound to take advantage of it was a tragedy, and a tragedy that the only alternative to his conquering her seemed to be for her to conquer him."

When they set sail for India Teresa find a role and her confidence grows a little more. She helps with young children, and she formed a tentative friendship with Miss Spooner, an elderly spinster who was travelling to visit her sister. Her father lacks a role, and is left to worry over mosquito nets and play the occasional game of piquet.

In India though the story that had played out in London would play out again. Teresa was overwhelmed and that made her awkward, leaving his father to organise and mange their progress. He was ineffectual, and so Teresa stepped forward, with the interest in the strange new world they were encountering.

The early pages of this novel were an intriguing character study, so well done that even seemingly unsympathetic characters became interesting, but in India there would much more. Through Teresa's eyes I saw the wonders of India, and I was as smitten as she was and as Emma Smith had been. She caught so many impressions so very, very well.

"Teresa's head was full of sound and colour. Her head was a receptacle for tumbled rags of impression, rags torn from exotic garments that could never be pieced entirely together again; but the rags were better."

The sea voyage, the journey though India, the feelings of strangers in a strange land are caught perfectly; every detail, every description feels so right.

In Assam Teresa meets the older half-sister her father adores.

Ruth is a beauty, she had been told that since she was a child, but her tragedy was that she was so caught up in presenting that image to the world, that she had lost the woman she really was. Edwin, her husband adored her, she wanted to tell him how she really felt, but she lacked the courage to tarnish the façade she had worked so hard to create.

It's a compelling, heart-breaking, horribly believable portrait.

The presence of her father and her half-sister unsettles Ruth's world; Teresa didn't realise, she was caught up with new experiences and impressions.

There was a tragedy and Ruth thought that it might offer her an escape. Maybe it did

Sadness and hopefulness mingle in the end of this story

There is so much that makes it special.

Smith's prose really is gorgeous. It's distinctive, it's right, and the descriptions so lovely and they catch every sensation. She follows the journey and she manages the both the day-to-day and the set pieces wonderfully well.

"Lights, no bigger than the candles on a Christmas cake, fringed every balcony, every wall, every stall, every hovel, a multitude of tiny red flames flickering alive in the huge dark night. They were still being lit: glistening haunches bent forward, hands poured a trickle of oil into saucers...The warm air was soft with sorrow. They trod among the muddy unseen ashes of the dead. Widows lay along the slushy steps, prostrate in grief, or crouched forward silently setting afloat their candles in little boats of tin the size and shape of withered leaves."

The characters and relationships are captured beautifully; with the understanding and the empathy that they lack.

The direction that the plot takes is unpredictable; it isn't contrived, it twists and turns as life does,

And everything works together beautifully, in this profound story of people alive in the world.

"India went on and on, on and on, as though it had no end, as though it had no beginning, as though seas and shores and other continents were only part of a feverish dream, as though this was the whole world and nothing existed beyond it; a world fat and dry on whose immense surface, far apart from one another, dwelt men and their beasts, living and dying together, generation after generation."

Patricia says

I'm glad I didn't stay put off by Elizabeth Bowen's characterization of this novel as "savage comedy." Certainly, Smith does make sharp, cynical assessments of her character's motivations, but she also fills the novel with lots of poetry and vulnerability and curiosity. The lyric opening lines were captivating. Smith's poetic, unique perspective made this an arresting, unforgettable novel.

Rosemary says

I adored this story of 14-year-old Teresa who is suddenly taken from England to India by her father in the late 1940s. Emma Smith made a similar journey herself and kept a detailed diary. There is a wealth of evocative detail but the characterisations of Teresa, her father, and people met along the way are surprisingly vivid too. The married sister they go to visit turns out to be an unexpected character.

Jane says

Only a really good writer can make you enjoy a nasty customer: think of Jane Austen's Mrs. Norris or Thackeray's Becky Sharp. Emma Smith isn't quite that good, but her Mr. Digby is a thoroughly rotten old man, spiteful, mean, selfish - and yet so perfectly drawn that you follow him all the way to India quite contentedly. And his daughter Teresa - well, having suffered her whole life with unfeeling relatives, she looks like she might just achieve happiness in the end. Bravo.

Sanna says

A story about a young Teresa, her father and their journey to India to stay with his eldest daughter. The depictions of their journey is beautiful and the writing style is very lyrical and you can really sense the newness that an inexperienced 14 year old experiences the world in the 1930's.

The last part, where they arrive to the sisters place does lack something and Ruth, the big sister, doesn't get enough depth to become interesting.

A beautiful book on how the english treated travelling and indians at the time.

Margaret says

Teresa Digby lives a fairly ordinary English life; she is fourteen, going to boarding school and living with her aunt, because her father and mother are separated. When her father discovers that her mother is about to return from America to visit Teresa, he impetuously decides to escape by taking Teresa all the way to India, to the tea plantation where her half-sister Ruth lives with her husband, Edwin. Teresa has always felt out of place in England; she feels oddly at home in India, yet there are still conflicts which must be resolved, between Teresa and her father, Teresa and Ruth, Ruth and Edwin.

This is an unusual book and not easy to write up. The characters are vivid and often not very likable, yet Smith shows their thoughts and emotions with such perspicuity that I found them engaging even when I didn't like them.

I thought the book's greatest strength was in its intensely sensual portrayal of its environment, from the first sentence ("The birds came and picked holes in the sleeping ears of Teresa Digby.") through the noisy, colorful shipboard journey and on into noisy, colorful India, which so entrances Teresa. Really, it was especially the aural quality of the writing that I found fascinating: Teresa wakened by bird noises, the children shrieking on the ship, the "inhumanly hopeless" scream of a peacock. *The Far Cry* is a perfect title, thinking about it.

Jane says

As an example of the author's fine writing, here is a passage describing a young daughter's sorrow at her father's rare effort to forge a relationship with her. "She saw the gap between them more clearly than before, realized how wide it was, and for the first time was saddened by it rather than despairing. However much they might feel about it in the dark, their hands would always miss. ...He was stone to her, and she would always bruise herself against him."

This is a tale mainly of a young girl, raised largely by her father and aunt who do not understand her. Off to India with her father she goes and from that time on, it sets forth the opening up of her personality and her increasing confidence in her own abilities. She forges unlikely and rewarding relationships. But it is much more than that with unforgettable character sketches and the magic of India come to life as well.

Bill Kupersmith says

The thought of Emma Smith continues to haunt me. She is less than 20 years older than me & I keep imagining that had we met when I was in England in my 20s we might have been friends. But I'd not known she existed till a couple of years ago when I saw a review of her memoir *As Green as Grass* in the *Speccie* & then almost miraculously found a copy on the uni new book shelf & I was totally captivated by the youthful Emma in her teens & 20s in England & on a trip to India immediately after the war as the most junior person & only woman on a documentary film crew. Since reading *Green as Grass* I've been making desultory progress with a reprint of *Maiden's Trip*, an account of her service as a boater on the Grand Union Canal during the war. I love that book - the way the girls lived & ate & dressed on the narrow boats reminds me so much of my ocean racing days & it is a model for how to organise a memoir that doesn't really have a plot (must get back to writing my own about my year as a chaplain resident @ the medical centre). So when I discovered her novel *The Far Cry* had been reprinted in England, I ordered a copy. Whilst I have taken a year to read it, I have quite loved it; the slow pace has been part of its charm. *The Far Cry* has as easy a plot to summarise as Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* - & just as impossible. Teresa Digby, a 14 year old English schoolgirl, is taken by her eccentric father on a passage by steamer from Southampton to Bombay, & from thence they travel by railway to Calcutta & then on to Assam, where they are to visit Teresa's half-sister Ruth, who is married to Edwin, a tea grower. What happens afterwards surprised & delighted me. Much of the story was based on Emma's own experience in India, tho' the choice of a central character barely in her teens very much alters the flavour. Because some of the characters (but not those whom we like) treat Teresa as too inconsequential to matter, they don't bother to hide who they really are; the author is a keen observer of affectations & foibles. In lots of ways, India herself is the real subject of the novel, as she is in Katy Gardner's *Losing Gemma*, a book I found both totally fascinating and somewhat disturbing, tho' Gardner's characters are older & the adventures scarier. Not all that much exciting happens to Teresa, except for the encounter with a tiger. (Having once enjoyed an experience very similar to hers, but with a lion, I have some idea of what she felt.) The way a ship becomes her passengers' entire world during a sea voyage also resonated with me, tho' I was travelling only from New York to Southampton. (I sometimes fantasise that I'm wearing a double breasted white suit & a Panama hat aboard a P&O steamer 'somewhere east of Suez'!) I'm not sure how to recommend *The Far Cry* or to whom. It has a maturity of observation & keenness of outlook that recall Henry James. It's almost impossible to imagine a young woman in her mid-20s wrote it. (There is a wonderful cover photo for *Green as Grass* you can find that shows the author wearing shorts & sitting by the banks of the Seine composing it on a portable typewriter, tho' personally I cannot imagine writing more than a couple of paragraphs in her posture.) But there's not a whiff of James's finickiness. Some writers have compared Emma Smith to Elizabeth Bowen - maybe I'll try her sometime. Anyway, I hope Emma Smith will continue to find readers, tho' I fear there will never be a lot of them. But both as a writer & as a person, Emma Smith is surely someone whom your simply knowing she existed feels like an honour & a privilege.

Barbara says

The book begins by introducing us to a group of unlikeable characters-14-year old Teresa Digby, her father and aunt- in England. Teresa and her father soon set sail for India for what appears to be the flimsiest of reasons. When they arrive in Bombay, the story and writing became pure magic for me.

Parsley Spasbinder says

As the afterword says, this is a book that is very engaging and which is rather complex. It does stay with you for quite some time after reading it. It is very much of its time, though, which makes it a little bit terse at times. A little hidden gem...

(Lonestarlibrarian) Keddy Ann Outlaw says

Teresa Digby, age 14, leaves England for India in the company of her curmudgeonly father who she hardly knows. Having been raised by a stodgy aunt, she has not been very well nourished nor loved. Sullen Teresa has long been an outsider, feeling misplaced and unwanted. She and her father find some small commonality by playing cards as their ocean vessel wends towards India. Teresa is no beauty, but behind her many defences against the world, we see her sensitivity and intelligence. Though she dreads India, to her joy India turns out to be a vivid place of explosive color and adventure. Teresa meets the older half sister her father much adores, Ruth, a beautiful woman who harbors great unhappiness with her married life on a tea plantation. For a short time, Ruth, her adoring husband Edgar, Mr. Digby and Teresa form an unlikely family unit.

Teresa has many awkward and meaningful moments of awakening, keenly described and well developed by Emma Smith, who as a young British woman in the 1940s, visited India. Smith's skill at bringing India to life is incredible. This book is a true gem, a literary masterpiece, and deserves comparison with the works of D H Lawrence, Virginia Woolf or E M Forster. Susan Hill of Persephone Books rediscovered *The Far Cry* and brought it back into publication, and I certainly hope it never again disappears into obscurity.
