

Tara (Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day*)

Realistic

Character Tara is the opposite of her older, domineering sister, Bimla. Tara lacks confidence, does not want to go to school, avoids confrontation and seeks attention from others to compensate for her absentee parents. Teased and timed, she escapes by marrying at a young age and living in the US, with a husband, who is scarcely less controlling than her sister. Still, her experience of living abroad and being the mother of two daughters adds depth of her understanding of her family, her past and of India as a culture. When she returns to Delhi, to attend her niece's wedding, she is more assertive and insightful. Back in the old, decaying house, she is struck by the lethargy, the lack of initiative, the absence of ambition. She wants to question Bimla about this perceived inertia, but realises that she will not be understood, that she is out of place in this old world. When she does express others ideas to Bimla, they seem to be largely shaped by her husband. Tara is glad that she is free from the age-old conflicts of India, both within the family and the country, but at the same time she is nostalgic about being with her sister and brothers in the old family home in Delhi. She wants to reconnect with both her sister and her heritage.

Activities As a child, Tara plays in the garden and house with her siblings. She is teased a lot and runs to her aunt for comfort. She also frequently visits the neighbours' house and becomes friends with two sisters in that family. Later, when she visits Bimla in the old house, she spends time talking with her sister and wandering about the garden, stirring up memories.

Illustrative moments

Realistic Tara, although attractive and sympathetic, has none of her brother Raja's imagination or her sister's determination. She is an ordinary person. When the three siblings play a game of 'who is your hero? Who do you want to grow up to be?', Raja and Bimla express grandiose ideas, while Tara simply says, 'I want to be a mother.' And of the three, she alone achieves her very realistic ideal.

Westernised When Tara revisits her old family home, she (and we) come to realise the extent to which she has grown apart from her family, from India and its traditions. She speaks American English, dresses as befits the wife of the Indian Ambassador to the US and finds the atmosphere of the old house dreary and inert. She sees the paint peeling, the curtains heavy with dust and the garden scorched by the summer heat. Even the garden gate sags on its rusted hinges. 'Nothing here ever changes,' she says to herself with a heavy sigh.

Nostalgic Tara's reaction to the old house is complicated by feelings of nostalgia. She finds it hard to comprehend the decaying and undisciplined state of affairs, in the structure of the house and the lives of her siblings, and yet she gains pleasure from remembering her childhood in the house. A day after her arrival from America, she is alone in the front room and sees a guava tree in the garden. Her taste buds tingle with the memory of the sharp guava fruit. Desai describes her feelings this way: 'If she had been sure Bakul [her husband] would not look out and see, she would have run down the veranda steps and searched for a guava fruit.'