

Encounter in the British Museum Tea Room

She asked him, was he in the antique business
Still; he — “It’s difficult to explain, you see”
Put on view, selectively,
His present life.

Then, of course, reciprocal
Disclosures — “Let me guess,”
He said, to draw her forth — “Married to
A doctor, perhaps?”

(Then, she’d been a nurse) “Living
At Stamford, Ongar, some place where the tube line
Ends?” (She saw him looking at her ring).
She didn’t ask

If he were married, it came out though. She’d
Once said (he said — she’d forgotten it) she thought
He never would. She *did* slowly recall he’d
Not seemed the husband sort.

But then, none had except
The radiographer she’d married. Cups of tea
Only last so long. Shuffling chairs,
A muddled word or two,

They parted, he to the Reading Room, she
(Mother had the children) to the Parthenon
Friezes,

their white undomestic bliss.

HUGH UNDERHILL