

Charleston

Firle, East Sussex

The mode of piety here is to use first names,
and the guide takes us from room to room
talking about Clive and Vanessa and Duncan.
She knows all about the difficulties
of restoration: making plaster with goat's hair,
matching bits of paint scraped from the walls
with paintings of the rooms. I imagine
Vanessa and her gay lover, Duncan,
painting the room for Vanessa's husband, Clive.
I'd call them civilized to the point of barbarism,
but everyone felt some redeeming jealousy.
I notice motion detectors in each room,
watchmen of the security system.
The little eyes blink red when anyone moves.
A house of the dead suits the system best.
I like the Morpheus headboard, a mask in pastels,
in Maynard's room, where he wrote his classic
The Economic Consequences of the Peace,
at a thousand words a day. Later he married
his Russian ballerina and lived
down the road. The wife wasn't bright enough,
it seems: Vanessa observed that Maynard
"is simple," "not analytical like us,"
though Bertrand Russell thought otherwise.
After a while no one saw much of Maynard.
Angelica was born in the room of Duncan, her father,
on Christmas Day. Bunny Garnett, who'd been
Duncan's lover, thought the baby was beautiful
and said he'd marry her some day, and so he did.
As we leave Duncan's room, and the eye winks red,
I recall that someone asked Keynes about a policy:
"In the end, how will this measure affect us?"
"In the end," said simple Maynard, "we're all dead."

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