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How to Be a More Interesting Woman: A Polite Guide for the Poetess

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SAFIYA SINCLAIR

*How to Be a More Interesting Woman:
A Polite Guide for the Poetess*

Call me Mary. Call me Sophie.
Call me what you like.
I'll answer to any man who looks
at me right.

You may come to my garden
and steal hydrangeas in the night.
I'll suck your thumb
and play dumb.

I'll pretend I can make anything
grow. Rosebushes and violets
and bruises for show. I'll open
my hot mouth for an orchid

to snake out; I've been practising
this bee-sting pout. I will titter
and fluster and faint. Write hundreds
of sonnets in your name.

(Each one born fat and sunny.
Then I can claim to have made
something happy.)
Light pools slick in my eyelids—

I am all lashes and lips.
I have learnt how to smile, how to
talk with my hips, how to swallow
my words, how to make myself

small. I won't make a fuss.
I will coo. I will crawl.
And if you knock right,
this spine will give out—

I will crumble and weed and paw
at your feet. Unbraid and emote,
walk faceless from the brink;
if you spit, I will drink.

I will grow heavy and silent
and sick. I will strip you right down
to the bone. I will take your name.
I will take your home

and wake dark with a song
on which you finally choke,
my black hair furring thick
in the gawk of your throat.