

Annabel was now in demand for small parts in films, always of the same type: she was called for wherever a little slip of a thing was needed – the typist who just happened to return to the office for the parcel she had forgotten when the fatal argument was in progress in the boss's room next door, the little housemaid whose unforeseen amorous exchanges with the delivery

5 boy waylaid the flight plans of the kidnappers, the waif on the underground railway who was one of those who never got home to her lodgings at Poplar; and then she played a more prominent part as the nurse wrongfully accused of stealing drugs, and who woke up by and by in a private room of a hospital in Bangkok, under the watchful eyes of a 'nurse' whom she recognized as a former patient of hers; and she played many other parts. Her eyes were not large, but on the
10 screen they came out so, by some mystery. By some deeper, more involved mystery, another ten years were to pass before Luigi Leopardi, whom many of his friends called 'V' – pronounced 'Voo' – because his real name was Vincenzo, the Italian producer, transformed her eyes, on picture-screens, into those of a Cat-Tiger. (The film company's press secretary first described her as 'The Cat-Tiger' in the publicity that preceded the film *The House on the Piazza* with
15 which she made her first big success. But before her film was released Luigi had changed this to 'English Lady-Tiger', as she was henceforth described on the billing and many other places.)

But in those earlier times when she began to be in demand in English films, she had no means of knowing that she was, in fact, stupid, for, after all, it is the deep core of stupidity that it thrives on the absence of a looking-glass. Her husband, when she was in his company with his
20 men friends, and especially with Billy O'Brien, tolerantly and quite affectionately insinuated the fact of her stupidity, and she accepted this without resentment for as long as it did not convey to her any sense of contempt. The fact that she was earning more and more money than her husband seemed to her at that time a simple proof that he did not want to work. The thought of his laziness nagged her against all contrary evidence and emerged in unpleasant forms,
25 unforeseen moments, embarrassing, sometimes in public, from her sharp little teeth:

'Sorry, I've got to go home to bed. I'm the worker of the family.'

And more and more, Frederick stayed at home all day in their Kensington flat, living on her money, reading book after book – all the books he had never had leisure to read before. He had craved for this contribution to his life. There were few parts suited to his acting talents, so far
30 as talent, continually unapplied, can be said to exist. Frederick, however, held to a theory that a random collision of the natal genes had determined in him a bent for acting only substantial parts in plays by Strindberg, Ibsen, Marlowe and Chekov (but not Shakespeare); and so far as that went he was right, everything being drably right in the sphere of hypotheses, nothing being measurably or redeemably wrong. In fact, his decision about what parts he was suited to
35 perform on the stage of the theatre did not matter; he was never considered for any parts in the plays he wanted to act in.

Muriel Spark, *The Public Image*, Virago Press

- Comment on the ways in which the idea of a 'public image' is developed in this passage.