

GERALD & SUSAN

10

Woman In Mind

Susan wanders away slightly and gazes out

Susan Just look at the rose garden today. A mass of pinks and reds and yellows . . .

Bill stands waiting for a second. Susan continues to stare at her garden

Bill (hearing something) Ah, here they come, I do believe.

Susan Good. Now perhaps you'll believe me.

Bill (to someone off in the distance) Hallo, good morning. (Turning to her) Mrs Gannet? Susan? Remember them now? Your husband and your sister-in-law? (Gently) Mrs Gannet . . .

Susan (turning) Who on earth's Mrs Gannet when she's—? (As she speaks and turns, her real family enters. She breaks off. She stares at the two who have just entered)

First, the Reverend Gerald Gannet, a solemn man in his middle forties. With him his sister, Muriel, much as described by Bill earlier. She is a woman who has known her share of suffering and is anxious others should know about it too. Certainly, as seen through Susan's (and therefore to a large extent our own) eyes, the two present an unattractive picture, entirely lacking the lightness and ease of her earlier family

Gerald Hallo, dear.

Muriel Another cup of tea, Susan?

Susan looks at them in horror. Her knees buckle, she gives a terrible moan and falls into a faint causing a Black-out

During the Black-out, Muriel and Bill exit

There is the briefest of pauses. Then we hear Susan's cry as she jolts awake with a start. The Lights come up abruptly. We are still in the garden. It is morning again. Susan is seated in a garden chair. Another couple of chairs are also in evidence. Gerald is standing nearby. It is he, apparently, who has woken her

Gerald Were you asleep?

Susan (shaking herself awake) Yes, I must have—must have dozed off . . .

Gerald It's eleven-thirty. I thought you should know.

Susan Why?

Gerald Rick's here for lunch.

Susan Yes, I know. You told me.

Gerald paces round the garden rather restlessly

Gerald There is a school of thought that believes that sleep is for the night. You seem to be out to disprove them . . . Is that bush dead? It looks dead from here.

Susan I'd sleep at night if I could. I'm finding it very difficult recently . . .

Gerald Hardly surprising. If you sleep all day.

Susan (rather irritably) What do you want, Gerald? Do you want me to do something for you?

Gerald No, no. Don't stir yourself on my account. I was just taking a brief break from the book. Thought I'd see what you were doing. Now I know. Sleeping.

Act I

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Susan Might I remind you, I only came out of hospital this morning.

Gerald Presumably they released you because they considered you fit and well. Anyway, Bill Windsor just phoned. Said he'd look in later.

Susan Oh, he doesn't have to bother . . .

Gerald Ask him for a tablet or something. To help you sleep. At night. Or perhaps a stimulant. To keep you awake. In the daytime.

Susan Has it ever occurred to you why I can't sleep at nights?

Gerald Insomnia?

Susan Perhaps it's because I'm not very happy, Gerald.

Gerald Well, who is? These days. Very few.

Susan You seem happy.

Gerald Do I? Maybe I'm just better at hiding these things. Who knows?

Susan At least you sleep at night.

Gerald Only because I'm exhausted from a full day's work. I give my body no option.

Susan Zonk.

Gerald I beg your pardon?

Susan You just zonk out.

Gerald I've no idea what that means. Zonk? There's your solution. Fill your day a bit more. Then you'll sleep.

Susan (flaring) I work extremely hard, Gerald, and you know it. I help you whenever I'm able. I run this house for you—

Gerald With the help of my sister, you do—

Susan No, Gerald, despite Muriel's help, I run this house. I do all the cooking, the bulk of the washing up, all the laundry—including Muriel's—I cope with the sheer boring slog of tidying up after both of you, day after day, I make the beds, I—

Gerald All right. All right, dear. We don't need the catalogue. All I am saying is—you still don't seem to have enough to do.

Susan No, you're absolutely right, Gerald. I don't. Not nearly enough. Not any more.

Gerald Something the matter?

Susan There must be. I don't know what my role is these days. I don't any longer know what I'm supposed to be doing. I used to be a wife. I used to be a mother. And I loved it. People said, "Oh, don't you long to get out and do a proper job?" And I'd say, "No thanks, this is a proper job, thank you. Mind your own business." But now it isn't any more. The thrill has gone.

Gerald Oh, we're back on that, are we?

Susan 'Fraid so . . .

Gerald "The trivial round, the common task, Will furnish all we need to ask . . ."

Susan Yes, it's usually about now that you come up with that invaluable piece of advice, Gerald. The point is it's not true. They don't. Furnish. All we need to ask. Not on their own. Whoever wrote it was talking through his hat. Anyway, how can you possibly believe anybody who rhymes "road" with "God" . . .

Gerald All one can say is that they're words that have provided comfort to several generations . . .

Susan Good-o.

Gerald (*suddenly irritated by her*) If you want something to do, why don't you pull up that dead bush?

Susan It's not dead. I planted it yesterday. In between hitting myself on the head ...

Gerald How is the head?

Susan Fine. The bump's going down. Scarcely feel it.

A silence. Gerald walks about again

Gerald Bill Windsor was telling me you'd been — hallucinating.

Susan Was he?

Gerald Apparently you saw people. Is that so?

Susan I thought doctors were supposed to treat things in confidence ...

Gerald He told me. I'm your husband. He felt I should know. In case it happened again. Has it happened again?

Susan No.

Gerald (*amused by this*) What sort of people did you see? Were they nice? I hope so.

Susan Very nice, thank you. Most attractive and dishy.

Gerald It was a—sexual—thing, then, was it?

Susan No.

Gerald No?

Susan Not really.

Gerald Was—I there?

Susan No, you were not. Nobody I knew was there. Except for Bill Windsor, of course ...

Gerald Bill Windsor? Good Lord, do you mean you were fantasizing over Bill Windsor?

Susan No. Bill was just there.

Gerald What was he doing?

Susan Nothing much. Struggling with his bag. Falling over frogs ...

Gerald Much the same as he does in real life.

Susan It was real life.

Gerald I thought you said this was a fantasy?

Susan It was. Bill was real. The rest was a fantasy. Oh, I can't explain it. You wouldn't understand, anyway.

Gerald I don't know. Some would say, that for a man in my line of business, it was very much up his street. (*He laughs at this*) I mean as a specialist in matters unseen ...

Susan Yes, all right, Gerald. That's a jolly good joke ...

Gerald But I can't be of help in your case?

Susan We've known each other rather a long time, haven't we?

Gerald Said by anybody else, that could have been interpreted as quite an affectionate remark. Spoken by you, it sounds like an appalling accusation.

Susan (*offhandedly*) Well, you know I don't love you any more, Gerald. You knew that.

Gerald Yes. I did know. (*He pauses*) I don't think you've ever said it—quite so baldly as that before—but I got the message ...

Susan I'm still reasonably fond of you.

Gerald Yes?

Susan Most of the time. Well, don't look so glum. You don't love me, either.

Gerald Yes, I do.

Susan Oh. Come on ...

Gerald I do. At least, I'm not aware that my feelings towards you have altered that much—

Susan What? Not at all?

Gerald Not that I'm aware of—

Susan Oh, Gerald—

Gerald I still feel the same—

Susan We don't kiss—we hardly touch each other—we don't make love—we don't even share the same bed now. We sleep at different ends of the room—

Gerald That's just sex you're talking about. That's just the sexual side—

Susan Well, of course it is—

Gerald There's more to it than that, surely?

Susan Not at the moment there isn't.

Gerald You mean that the—sex—is the only thing that's mattered to you in our relationship?

Susan Of course not.

Gerald That's what you seem to be saying.

Susan What I'm saying is ... All I'm saying is, that once that's gone—all that—it becomes important. Over-important, really. I mean before, when we—it was just something else we did together. Like gardening. Only now I have to do that on my own as well. It was something we shared. A couple of times a week. Or whatever—

Gerald More than that. More than that.

Susan Yes. Whatever. The point is that then, everything else, the everyday bits, just ticked along nicely. But take that away, the really joyous part of us—and everything else rather loses its purpose. That's all.

A pause

Gerald What you're really saying is, that I've let you down. Failed to deliver. Is that it?

Susan That's not what I mean. It's nobody's fault. It just happened, over the years.

Gerald My fault. I see.

Susan I knew you'd say that.

Gerald That's how you make it sound, anyway. (*He paces about*) I rather thought you'd lost interest in all that, you know.

She does not answer

I thought that when a woman got to—our age—she more or less ... switched off.

Susan Yes, well, I'm a freak, Gerald. I'm afraid you married a freak ...

Muriel comes from the house at this moment bearing a tray with some dubious-looking cups of coffee

Muriel I thought I'd make some coffee. Since nobody else was ...

Gerald (*now full of bonhomie*) Ah, bless you, Muriel.