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SF PERUSALS

WOMAN IN MIND

(December Bee)

by Alan Ayckbourn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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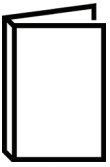
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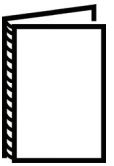
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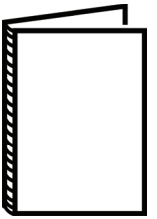
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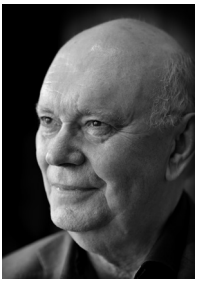
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alan Ayckbourn has worked in theatre as a playwright and director for over fifty years, rarely if ever tempted by television or film, which perhaps explains why he continues to be so prolific. To date he has written more than 79 plays, many one act plays and a large amount of work for the younger audience. His work has been translated into over 35 languages, is performed on stage and television throughout the world and has won countless awards.

Major successes include: *Relatively Speaking, How the Other Half Loves, Absurd Person Singular, Bedroom Farce, A Chorus of Disapproval,* and *The Norman Conquests.* In recent years, there have been revivals of *Season's Greetings* and *A Small Family Business* at the National theatre, in the West End *Absent Friends, A Chorus of Disapproval, Relatively Speaking* and *How the Other Half Loves*. In 2015, Chichester mounted a very successful revival of *Way Upstream.*

Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph theatre from 1972 – 2009 where almost all his plays have been first staged, he continues to direct his latest new work there. In recent years, he has been inducted into American Theatre's Hall of Fame, received the 2010 Critics' Circle Award for Services to the Arts and became the first British playwright to receive both Olivier and Tony Special Lifetime Achievement Awards. He was knighted in 1997 for services to the theatre.

Image credit: Andrew Higgins.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

After a lifetime of playwriting (I first started as an unpublished writer at the age of ten!) my career has moved steadily forward from the status of untried tyro through to establishment figure to ageing experimentalist!

The work has reflected this. From the early tried and tested plays, (*Relatively Speaking, How the Other Half Loves, The Norman Conquests*, etc.) which thankfully people still seem happy to produce and come to see, through the middle period, larger scale so called "social" pieces (*Man of the Moment, A Chorus of Disapproval*) to the more recent smaller scale departures such as *Private Fears in Public Places, Snake in the Grass and Haunting Julia*, I have continued to experiment with shape and form, whilst I hope continuing to deepen my characters.

Throughout this, though, I have always needed to remind myself of the over riding prime directive drummed into me at an early age by my mentor, Stephen Joseph, that above all else a playwright is a story teller.

To keep an audience in their seats you need to involve them in a constantly unfolding series of unexpected twists and turns. These can, of course, be the narrative of the story itself as in *Relatively Speaking* or, as with *Woman in Mind* say, through the psychological development of the characters.

One of the nicest things people can ever say to me, coming out of a new play for the first time of seeing it, is "Well, I never saw THAT coming!"

Alan Ayckbourn

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WOMAN IN MIND

Woman in Mind was first performed in Scarborough at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round on 30th May, 1985. The cast was as follows:

SUSAN	Ursula Jones
BILL	Barry McCarthy
ANDY	Robin Herford
TONY	John Hudson
LUCY	Caroline Webster
GERALD	Russell Dixon
MURIEL	Heather Stoney
RICK	Tom Bowles

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Adrian P. Smith

Subsequently presented by Michael Codron at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, on 3rd September, 1986, with the following cast:

SUSAN	Julia McKenzie
BILL	Peter Blythe
ANDY	Benedick Blythe
LUCY	Christina Barryk
TONY	John Hudson
GERALD	Martin Jarvis
MURIEL	Josephine Tewson
RICK	Daniel Flynn

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn
Designed by Roger Glossop

WOMAN IN MIND

Woman in Mind was first presented in New York City by the Manhattan Theatre Club, City Center Stage I on February 17, 1989. The cast was as follows:

SUSAN	Stockard Channing
BILL	Simon Jones
ANDY	Daniel Geroll
LUCY	Tracy Pollan
TONY	Michael Countryman
GERALD	Remak Ramsay
MURIEL	Patricia Conolly
RICK	John David Cullum

Directed by Lynne Meadow; Managing Director – Barry Grove; Sets by John Lee Beatty; Costumes by Ann Roth; Lighting by Pat Collins; Sound by John Gromada; Production Stage Manager – Ed Fitzgerald; Casting by Lyons/Isaacson

CHARACTERS

SUSAN

BILL, her doctor
GERALD, her husband
MURIEL, her sister-in-law
RICK, her son

ANDY, her husband
TONY, her brother
LUCY, her daughter

The action occurs within forty-eight hours and takes place in Susan's garden and beyond

Time—the present

ACT I

Darkness.

We hear the sound of a woman moaning as she regains consciousness. As she opens her eyes, there is bright afternoon garden sunlight. Throughout the play, we will hear what she hears; see what she sees. A subjective viewpoint therefore and one that may at times be somewhat less than accurate. The woman is **SUSAN**. *She is lying on the grass in the middle of her small, tidy, suburban garden.*

SUSAN Aaaah!

BILL WINDSOR, *a pleasant, rather nervous GP is kneeling on the grass a little away from her, attempting to open his medical case without much success. He fails to see her for a minute, so engrossed is he in his abortive task.* **SUSAN** *watches him. She is an unassuming woman in her forties, used to and happy to play second fiddle to more determinedly motivated personalities than her own. Only now, at this stage of her life, is she beginning to question this role she's played or perhaps been cast in.* **BILL** *is a year or two younger, eager to reassure, quick to apologize for his own shortcomings. Not though, alas, an instinctive healer of the sick. He notices* **SUSAN** *is awake.*

BILL Ah! Score ache...

SUSAN *(trying to sit up up)* Waah...

BILL Wo! Won't spider slit up pikelet...

SUSAN What?

BILL Skater baby.

SUSAN *(trying again to sit up, alarmed)* What are you saying...? *(Clasping her head)* Ah!

BILL *(pushing her back, gently)* Squeezy...squeezy...

SUSAN Squeezy?

BILL Score grounds appeal cumquat doggy Martha hat sick on the bed...

SUSAN Sick on the what?

BILL Squeezy, cow, squeezy...

SUSAN I've no idea what you're saying. What are you saying?

BILL Saul bite. Saul bite.

SUSAN Who are you, anyway? Where am I?

BILL Octer bin sir. Climb octer bin sir. Mrs sure pardon choose 'un.

SUSAN Oh God, I've died. That's what it is. I've died. And—wherever it is I've—gone nobody speaks English... What am I going to do? What am I going to do?

BILL Choose 'un, choose 'un. Pea squeak jinglish. Pea squeaking jinglish cow. Choose 'un...

SUSAN *(tearful now)* I'm in hell. I've died and gone to hell.

BILL Choose 'un...

SUSAN Why have I gone to hell? Why me? I've tried so terribly hard, too. Terribly hard...

BILL Susan...

SUSAN You've no idea how hard I've tried. There must be some mistake...

BILL Susan...?

SUSAN Susan? Yes, that's me. Susan. *(Pointing at herself, loudly, as to a foreigner)* Me Susan, yes.

BILL You're Susan, yes.

SUSAN Susan, yes. Thank heavens.

BILL December bee?

SUSAN December bee? Oh, dear God, he's off again. *(Loudly, as before)* No bees in December. Not here. They're asleep. They go to sleep.

BILL Susan, I'm Bill Windsor. Do you not remember me? Doctor Bill Windsor...

SUSAN Doctor Windsor? Bill Windsor?

BILL That's it. Well done.

SUSAN Doctor Windsor, are you dead as well?

BILL *(laughing rather nervously)* No, no. Not as far as I know, anyway. We're both very much alive, Susan. This is your garden. You're in your garden...

SUSAN My garden? This isn't my garden...

BILL Yes, yes, it is. I promise you.

SUSAN My garden's enormous. Five times the size of this, I can tell you... *(She tries to rise)* Ah!

BILL No, no. Don't try to sit up, not yet. Easy now, easy. Susan, you've apparently caught a bit of a knock on the head. You're going to feel a bit wobbly for a time so just stay put here...

SUSAN Did I bang my head? How did I bang my head?

BILL I think it was the old trick. You stood on the end of the garden rake. Nasty thing to happen.

SUSAN *(disgusted)* Typical of me. Typical.

BILL I've—er—sent for an ambulance...

SUSAN Ambulance? Oh, no, I don't need that.

BILL I'd rather you did if you don't mind. The point is—blows to the head—you never can tell—could be a delayed reaction. Better safe than sorry. Probably just an overnight stop, that's all. Be back home here tomorrow. Right as rain. Probably.

SUSAN Oh dear, what a nuisance.

BILL There's a little bit of bruising—I had a quick look. Skin's not broken—probably have a nasty lump... Luckily it won't show much. Under the hair. Still they'll be able to tell at the hospital better than I can...

SUSAN They're not going to need to shave my head, are they?

BILL Good Lord, no. You're not going in for brain surgery. At least, I hope not. I'm afraid you'll have to wait for them, if you don't mind. The point is, I'm afraid I'm having a bit of trouble. With my bag there.

SUSAN Trouble?

BILL Yes, I can't get it open. The lock keeps jamming. I had an accident with it. In my car door. This morning. And. I mean I *can* get it open. In a real emergency. But it does entail a good deal of force in order to do so. And stuff tends to scatter. All over the place. So.

SUSAN Oh, well. Please don't bother on my account.

BILL Thanks.

A pause. **BILL** *glances at his watch.* **SUSAN** *sits.*

Well...

SUSAN *(sensing his unease)* You don't have to stay if you've—

BILL No, no, no. Best for me to hang on. Just in case—things. Get. *(He looks at his watch again)* Shouldn't be long. *(A sudden thought)* Unless you'd like something. Would you like a glass of water?

SUSAN No, thank you.

BILL Tea? What about tea? Now, you'd like a cup of tea, wouldn't you?

SUSAN Well...

BILL I'll see if I can rustle up a cup of tea. Wait there. I'll do it. I'll also check to make sure she got that ambulance

organized. Sit tight. *(He moves away towards the unseen house. Stopping suddenly to listen)* Someone else's not too happy by the sound of it...

SUSAN Sorry?

BILL The dog. Next door, is it?

SUSAN Dog?

BILL Howling. There. Can't you hear it? Hasn't stopped. Probably wants to be let in or—whoops— *(He trips and nearly falls)*

SUSAN You all right?

BILL Yes, yes. Always doing that. Accident prone, that's me. You put it there, I'll fall over it. Back in a tick.

BILL *exits.*

SUSAN *sits alone for a moment. It is very quiet with none of the sounds one normally expects to hear in a suburban garden.*

SUSAN *(to herself, puzzled)* Dog? I can't hear a dog...

In the distance, **ANDY***'s voice is heard. The garden grows imperceptibly bigger and lighter.*

ANDY *(offstage)* Susie... Susie, darling...

SUSAN *(calling back)* I'm here, Andy. In the herb garden.

ANDY *rushes on. A tall, good-looking, athletic man, easy-going and charming. He is perhaps a year or two younger than* **SUSAN.**

ANDY Susie? I've just seen Bill Windsor. Are you all right?

SUSAN I'm perfectly fine, Andy. Just a silly accident, that's all.

ANDY *(sitting beside her, immensely concerned)* Darling, what on earth happened? I can't leave you for five minutes, can I? What happened? He said you knocked yourself out...

SUSAN I just—banged my head. It's nothing, Andy, really. You mustn't fuss...

ANDY Of course I fuss. You're my wife. I love you. How on earth did you do it?

SUSAN I'm not even going to bring myself to tell you. Its so ridiculously silly...

ANDY I can't see what you've banged your head on? Unless you stood on that garden... *(Seeing her face)* You didn't stand on the garden rake, darling?

SUSAN *(mortified)* How could I have been so stupid?

ANDY *(fairly amused but doing his best to conceal it)* Oh, you daft thing... *(He hugs her)*

SUSAN *(clinging to him)* It could only happen to someone like me—

ANDY We're all going to have to take extra special care of you, aren't we?

SUSAN —only someone this clumsy could have done it.

LUCY*'s voice is heard in the distance.*

LUCY *(offstage, calling)* Mummy! Daddy!

ANDY *(calling)* Over here, chaps. In the herb garden. *(To* **SUSAN***)* We'll soon nurse you better.

LUCY *and* **TONY** *enter together.* **LUCY** *is a tall, good looking, athletic girl, easy-going and charming. She is in her early twenties, and tends to wear fresh, summery, rather timeless dresses.* **TONY***, on the other hand, is a tall, good-looking, athletic man, easy-going and charming. He is aged about thirty. Both appear to be midway through a game of tennis.* **TONY** *carries a glass of champagne.*

LUCY Is Mother all right? Is she all right?

ANDY Don't panic. She'll be OK. She's OK.

SUSAN Nothing to worry about...

TONY What have you been up to now, Big Sis?

SUSAN Something quite ridiculous, I refuse to tell you. You'll only laugh...

LUCY *(indignantly)* We won't laugh.

SUSAN Yes, you will. I know you two.

TONY *(proffering the glass)* Here, drink this.

SUSAN What is it?

TONY Champers. I've only just opened it.

LUCY Champagne at eleven in the morning, I ask you. He's actually playing with the glass in his hand.

TONY The thing that's really annoying her is that I'm inflicting a crushing defeat as well. *(Offering* **SUSAN** *the glass)* Here. It is vintage.

ANDY Drink it, darling, it'll buck you up.

SUSAN Do you think I should?

ANDY Best possible thing, isn't it, Tony?

TONY Absolutely...

LUCY But what happened to Mother? I'm dying to know. How did she bang her head?

ANDY Well...

SUSAN Andy, don't you dare tell them. I'm not having them screaming with laughter at me...

LUCY We're not going to scream with laughter. Are we, Tony?

TONY Absolutely not.

SUSAN Well, you might not, Lucy, but he's bound to.

ANDY There's no big deal about it. All that happened—

SUSAN Andy, don't you dare...

ANDY All that happened was, Susie went into the potting shed and the old tin bath in there slipped off the nail and fell on her—

LUCY Gosh!

SUSAN Thank you, darling. Thank you.

TONY I loathe and detest tin baths...

ANDY —and she was in such pain she came hopping out of the shed cursing and swearing and stepped on the garden rake... *(He laughs)*

SUSAN Andy! You beast!

LUCY *and* **TONY** *laugh.*

TONY *(laughing)* Stepped on the rake. I say...

LUCY *(laughing)* Honestly, Mummy, I didn't know people actually *did* that sort of thing...

SUSAN I think you're all absolutely horrid and heartless.

ANDY *(taking command)* OK, kids. Joke's a joke. Lucy...

LUCY Daddy?

ANDY We must get your mother upstairs and into bed...

SUSAN Oh, Andy, don't fuss—

ANDY Ask Mrs Simmonds to make a hot water bottle and light the fire in the master bedroom...

LUCY Right. *(She turns to go)*

ANDY And give her a hand if she needs it. It's Ethel's day off...

LUCY I'll see to it, Daddy.

ANDY Good girl.

LUCY *rushes off towards the house.*

SUSAN You really do spoil me, all of you...

ANDY Nonsense.

TONY We just want to get you fit so you can carry on slaving for us as usual.

ANDY *(taking the empty glass from* **SUSAN***)* Tony, get your sister another glass of this, will you?

SUSAN Andy, do you think I should? Bill Windsor's fetching some tea...

ANDY Tea? Oh, to hell with that...

TONY If it comes to a choice between Dom Perignon or Lapsang Souchong... Tell you what, I'll bring the ice bucket as well. You can pour it over your head.

TONY *lopes off.*

SUSAN *(watching him go, affectionately)* He never alters, does he?

ANDY Not a tittle. Feel sorry for him in a way.

SUSAN Sorry? Why?

ANDY Well, mostly, when you get a brother and sister like you two, things get shared. She gets the beauty, he gets the brains; or he gets the beauty, she gets the brains. Or even a bit for each of them. But with you and Tony, you've got the lot. All the brains, all the beauty. Hardly fair, is it?

SUSAN It's not true.

ANDY I'm afraid it is.

SUSAN But I love you for saying it, all the same. *(Starting to rise)* You can leave me now because I'm going to— *(She sways and nearly falls)* Whoops!

ANDY *(catching her and helping her to sit again)* Steady! You are going to do nothing except sit here. As soon as Tony comes back, we're going to carry you up to bed.

SUSAN *(loving every minute of it)* Oh, Andy...

ANDY Doctor's orders.

SUSAN I think Bill Windsor's orders are that I go into hospital for a checkup.

ANDY To blazes with that.

SUSAN He's ordered an ambulance for me.

ANDY Bill has?

SUSAN Apparently.

ANDY Oh, Lord. Hang on. *(He moves off)*

SUSAN Where are you going?

ANDY To cancel it.

SUSAN Cancel it?

ANDY I don't want you in hospital, I want you here where we can look after you properly. Get you into that place, we'll never see you again...

SUSAN *(calling him back)* Andy...

ANDY *(turning back to her)* Hmmm?

SUSAN Seriously. You do spoil me far too much.

ANDY Maybe. I don't know. Perhaps. *(Returning to her)* If we do, I'll tell you why it is. Because we'd all be lost without you. There's only one of you, you see. *(Smiling slightly)* Unfortunately. And we all need you very much. Me most especially. I mean, after all, what does Tony stand to lose? Just a big sister. So what? Plenty of those. Ten a penny. And Lucy? Well—girls and their mothers. We all know what they're like. She'd soon get over it. But me? I'd be losing a wife. And that I'd never get over. Not one as dear and as precious as you. *(He kisses her tenderly)* Whom, incidentally, I love more than words can ever say...

ANDY *moves away, and looking back on her, smiles and leaves, blowing her the gentlest of kisses on one of his fingers.*

SUSAN *stares after him. The lights fade upstage. After a slight pause,* **SUSAN** *gives a little strangled moan of pleasure.*

BILL *returns from the direction of the house. As he enters, he speaks to someone who has just passed him who, presumably, could have been* **ANDY**.

In the distance, briefly, a dog is heard howling to be let in.

BILL *(behind him)* ...right, right, splendid. Did the trick, did it? *(Arriving, to* **SUSAN***)* Sorry. Small delay. Trying to lend a hand in the kitchen. Fatal. Singed my sleeve. *(He sniffs his jacket)* Ah, well. *(Sniffing the other sleeve)* I spilt liquid paraffin on this one, so it more or less evens it up... Feeling any better?

SUSAN Much better, thank you.

BILL Splendid. It's on its way. I just checked. The ambulance.

SUSAN Ah. My husband hasn't spoken to you, then?

BILL Your husband?

SUSAN Yes. He seemed to feel I shouldn't go. He felt I'd be better off staying in bed here.

BILL Really? When did he say this?

SUSAN Just a minute ago.

BILL Extraordinary. I mean, I didn't even know he was home. I understood he was on his way. He'd been telephoned and was on his way.

SUSAN Well, he's here. He's just been talking to me.

BILL How odd. Your sister-in-law obviously got it wrong.

SUSAN My sister-in-law?

BILL Yes—Marion, is it?

SUSAN You mean my brother?

BILL Muriel. That's it.

SUSAN Tony.

BILL Tony?

SUSAN You mean my brother, Tony. Tall, fair, slim, good-looking in a rather weak sort of way…

BILL No, definitely Muriel. Short, dark, angular, grim-looking in a rather firm sort of way… I haven't seen any Tony at all.

SUSAN We don't have a Muriel. We have an Ethel but it's her day off. So it can't have been her.

BILL Anyway, the woman in the kitchen. The one who made the tea.

SUSAN Oh, that'll be Mrs Simmonds.

BILL Mrs Muriel Simmonds?

SUSAN I've no idea what her first name is, I've never asked her.

BILL But Mrs Simmonds is your sister-in-law?

SUSAN Certainly not, she's our cook.

BILL Cook?

SUSAN Yes. She's been with the family for—oh, ages and ages.

BILL *(very puzzled)* Has she? I see *(he pauses)* She—er-seemed to be fairly convinced, in her own mind at least, that she was your sister-in-law.

SUSAN Did she?

BILL That's the distinct impression she gave.

SUSAN Well. She can be very strange. *(She pauses)* She's Cornish, I believe.

BILL Is she? One got the overall nuance from talking to her of someone from slightly nearer—South London. Anyway. The woman who found you lying in the garden, the woman who phoned me—or rather phoned your own doctor, Geoff

Burgess, who happens to be on holiday, so you got his partner. Me. That woman.

SUSAN Possibly.

BILL The one who brought you out the tea. That one.

SUSAN Tea? What tea?

BILL Didn't you get the tea?

SUSAN Not yet. I thought you were bringing me some.

BILL No. She did. Her. Your Mrs Thing. I passed her just now. She was coming back with an empty cup in her hand.

SUSAN Really?

BILL So where did the tea go?

SUSAN Perhaps she drank it herself?

BILL She didn't come out here, then?

SUSAN I haven't seen her.

BILL No. Yes. I see. *(He stares at her for a moment. He picks up his bag and struggles to open it for a moment. Then, aware that Susan is watching him, he puts it down)*

SUSAN The only woman that I've seen all day has been my daughter.

BILL Oh, yes...

SUSAN She was playing tennis with Tony.

BILL Tennis?

SUSAN Yes.

BILL Where?

SUSAN *(mildly exasperated)* On the tennis court.

BILL Which is—where exactly? From here?

SUSAN *(with enormous patience)* Over there.

BILL Ah, yes. Silly question.

He looks at his watch. The dog is howling again in the distance.

Any minute now. It'll be here.

SUSAN You know, I don't think you believe me, do you?

BILL Yes, I do. No, no. Yes.

SUSAN Why don't you believe me?

BILL I do, I do. At least I believe that you believe it. It's just that I personally haven't seen hide nor hair of any of these people.

SUSAN Well, that's hardly my fault, is it? *(After a slight pause, helpfully)* I can hear the dog now. If that's any help.

BILL Good, good.

SUSAN You can hear it, too, can't you? *(Anxiously)* You can hear it?

BILL Oh, yes. *(He pauses)* No. I can't. I could but it stopped some time back.

SUSAN Oh. There's something wrong with me, then, isn't there?

BILL *(cautiously)* I wouldn't say that...

SUSAN Well, I suppose there could be with you...

BILL No, I wouldn't say that either.

SUSAN What would you say, then?

BILL You—don't recall whether you've got a son by any chance, do you?

SUSAN A son? Certainly not.

BILL No?

SUSAN Decidedly not. No, that I would remember. Well, I'd hardly forget whether or not I had a son, would I?

BILL No. It's just—well, I'm not your regular doctor, as I say—

SUSAN *(impatiently)* I know that. I remember, perfectly.

BILL But I have called on you and your—family in the past. To see your husband. And your—son. On one or two occasions. I think chicken-pox was one. I can't be certain about that.

SUSAN *(coolly)* You're obviously muddling me up with somebody else.

BILL *(rather significantly)* No, that's not all that likely, believe me.

A pause.

These—tennis courts that you can see...?

SUSAN I can't see them.

BILL You can't?

SUSAN No. Can you?

BILL No. That's not the point. The point is, can you?

SUSAN Of course I can't.

BILL Good. Splendid.

SUSAN They're round the back of the house.

BILL Oh.

Pause.

SUSAN I can see the swimming pool, if that's any help?

BILL Ah.

SUSAN And the lawn. And the rose beds and—yes—look, if you stand here on tiptoe you can just see the lake. Look.

BILL *(humouring her, straining to look)* Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

SUSAN Doesn't it look beautiful today? It's always best in the late afternoon sun.

BILL Yes. yes. *(He consults his watch again)*

A pause.

Yes.

SUSAN *(watching him)* You can't see any of it, can you?

BILL I see a small garden—very pleasant, very tidy, about twenty feet wide by maybe about thirty foot long... There's a little pond over there. Not a lot in it—a stone frog, is it?—I think it's a frog—the thing I fell over, anyway. Some flowerbeds with wallflowers—shrubs, several shrubs—one newly planted. Presumably by you. A rockery there—

SUSAN Please don't go on.

BILL What?

SUSAN I don't want to listen to any more of this.

BILL *(gently)* I'm afraid it's what's here.

SUSAN You're describing some place I wouldn't choose to live in, even in my wildest nightmares.

BILL Oh, I am sorry.

A silence.

SUSAN My brother brought me some champagne, you know.

BILL Did he? Jolly nice.

SUSAN Dom Perignon. Vintage nineteen seventy-eight.

BILL That's the stuff, eh? *(Laughing awkwardly)* He didn't leave any behind, did he?

SUSAN *(frostily)* I think it would be better if you went, Doctor.

BILL Oh, I'm not sure that would—

SUSAN It's all right. I'll arrange an appointment with Doctor Burgess—

BILL He's on holiday—

SUSAN —as soon as he returns...

BILL —for a fortnight. In Spain.

SUSAN Thank you so much for your help. Good-afternoon.

BILL Look, it's not the afternoon, it's eleven-fifteen in the morning and I really cannot leave you—

SUSAN I'm only waiting here for my husband, that's all. I'm not going to do anything foolish.

BILL But you will go in the ambulance, won't you?

SUSAN No.

BILL Ah. Now. I'm sorry. I really must insist you do.

SUSAN Not unless my husband is agreeable.

BILL Right, fine. Fair enough. We'll hang on for him then, shall we?

SUSAN If you like. I don't think he will agree. In fact I'm only waiting here because he insists on carrying me up to bed.

BILL Splendid. *(He gathers up his bag)*

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 Blackout.*

During the blackout, **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.

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.

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