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FIVE BIRDS IN A CAGE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By
GERTRUDE E. JENNINGS

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FIVE BIRDS IN A CAGE

Originally produced by Mr. Frederick Harrison at a matinee performance at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on Friday, March 19th, 1915, with the following cast of characters—

SUSAN (the Duchess of Wiltshire) .	*Miss Helen Haye.*
LEONARD (Lord Porth)	*Mr. Allan Aynesworth.*
NELLY (a Milliner's Assistant) . .	*Miss Marie Löhr.*
BERT (a Workman)	*Mr. Godfrey Tearle.*
HORACE (the Liftman)	*Mr. Gordon Harker.*

The play went into the evening bill on Tuesday, April 20th, 1915, with the following cast and was played for 284 consecutive performances.

SUSAN	*Miss Ellis Jeffreys.*
LEONARD	*Mr. H. R. Hignett.*
NELLY	*Miss Maud Bell.*
BERT	*Mr. Godfrey Tearle.*
HORACE	*Mr. Gordon Harker.*



To face page 7—Five Birds in a Cage

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FIVE BIRDS IN A CAGE

The SCENE *represents a tube lift, broadside on. The wall is covered with framed advertisements and has a bench running along it. The gates, one at each end, are set at an angle. There is an electric light in the ceiling* (C.) *and two oil lamps hang on nails near each gate. The lift measures* 8 *feet deep by* 17 *feet wide. Any difficulty with regard to gates can be overcome by obtaining two pieces of garden trellis painted black, or by nailing long narrow laths of wood criss-cross. The left-hand gate should be made to open. The two backings outside the gates (representing the funnel of the tube) should be neutral in colour. The unpainted back of a scene answers the purpose. When the curtain rises the scene is in total darkness. At first cue for lights a good light is thrown on the scene from behind* L. *hand gate; second cue light is thrown from* R. *hand gate; third cue light from electric bulb at top, or if not practicable, full lights.*

(*As the curtain is rising the sound of ascending lift is heard and suddenly stopped; then a voice,* SUSAN, *the Duchess of Wiltshire's.*)

SUSAN. Oh, the lights have gone out! We've stopped. Why have we stopped?

(*The curtain, now up, shows the stage to be in darkness.*)

Why have we stopped, liftman?

LIFTMAN. Dunno, lady.

SUSAN. Why have the lights gone out?

LIFTMAN. Dunno, lady.

SUSAN. Well! Strike a match somebody. I do so hate being in the dark. Don't be so helpless, Leonard! A match!

LEONARD. I'm sorry, Susan dear, I haven't one.

SUSAN. Has any one else?

(*A match is now struck by* BERT, *and a tube lift is dimly visible in which are four passengers and the* LIFTMAN.) (BERT *is extreme* L., NELLY *sits* L., SUSAN, C., LEONARD, R.C., LIFTMAN, R.)

Oh, thank you. Thank you so much. But aren't we going on? What has happened, liftman?

LIFTMAN. Dunno, lady.

SUSAN (*to the hearers*). These men never know! (*Graciously to* BERT.) You—Mr.—er—do *you* know what's wrong?

BERT. No, mum—can't say I do.

SUSAN. Of course, it's perfectly useless to ask *you*, Leonard!

LEONARD. Of course dear. (*Crosses* L.) (*To* BERT.) After you. (*Offers* BERT *cigarette.*) No? Thanks. (*Lights cigarette.*)

LIFTMAN. No smoking in the lift.

LEONARD. No, of course not. (*Blows out match.*)

SUSAN. There, it's out.

LEONARD. Don't be frightened, Susan.

(LIFTMAN *gets lamp from* R.)

SUSAN. I'm not in the least frightened, I'm merely very much annoyed. Why don't we go on? You know I shall be late for dinner. Why didn't I take a taxi?

(*The* LIFTMAN *lights a lamp.*)

There! (*Pause.*) He had a lamp all the while.

LEONARD (*crosses* R. *to* LIFTMAN). Do these lifts ever stop?

LIFTMAN. No, sir.

SUSAN. What a question! Can't you see they stop?

(*The* LIFTMAN *turns up lamp.*)

LEONARD. I can't see anything. (*Lights go half up.*)

(*The lamp now burns brightly and shows* SUSAN, *a handsome, smart woman of thirty, very well dressed in a gown that does up at the back;* LORD PORTH, *a well-dressed, good-looking man;* BERT, *a handsome young workman with a bag of tools; and* NELLY, *a pretty, fragile-looking young girl, who is carrying a large cardboard box.*)

SUSAN. That's a little better! Now, put the thing right, liftman, and let's get on.

LIFTMAN. 'Tain't nothing ter do with me, lady; I ain't stopped it, nor I can't put it right.

SUSAN. You ain't stopped it! I mean—Well, what's the matter with the silly lift?

LEONARD. I don't think the man knows, dear.

SUSAN (*lowering her voice*). Don't call me dear, Lord Porth. I don't even know why you're in this lift! Most undignified! And you know perfectly well that if we hadn't broken down we shouldn't have been speaking to each other at all.

LEONARD (R.C.). Don't be down on me, Susan. It wasn't my fault about the beastly night club.

SUSAN (C., *to* BERT). Don't you think, Mr—er—that we might light that other lamp as well?

BERT (L.C.). Cernly, mum.

SUSAN (*to* LEONARD). Men never think of things for themselves! (*Watches* BERT, *who is lighting lamp down* L.). Oh, that young man is very handsome, isn't he? (*Looks again at* LEONARD, *sighs and shakes her head, her eye falls on her shoe*). Do up my shoe, please Leonard. (*Up to back* R.)

NELLY (*to* BERT). Are we likely to be kept waiting long, do you know?

BERT (*kindly*). I shouldn't think so, miss—not more'n a minute or two. There's nothing to be frightened over.

NELLY. Oh, I'm not frightened, in that way. It's only of being late.

BERT. Got far to go?

NELLY. Not very. But it's important. I've got to take this dress, you see. It's due there at half-past seven. Promised. And it's for some one very grand, who'll be very angry if I'm late.

BERT. Well, it ain't your fault. *You* can't 'elp it, no more'n we can.

NELLY. That won't make any difference. Besides, p'raps they won't believe there was a breakdown. They'll say I've made it up. And if the customer is reely offended, p'raps I shall be sent away.

BERT. Don't you fret, I expect we shall get on in a minute. (*Turns up the lamp: lights full up.*) There! That's a bit brighter!

SUSAN. Thank you *so* much!

(NELLY *goes up again to seat, stands reading advertisements.*)

How very clever of you!

BERT. Don't name it, mum. I say, mate, there ain't much oil in this 'ere.

LIFTMAN (*stoically*). Ain't there?

LEONARD. Really! (*He strolls over to look at it.*)

SUSAN. Oh, but it's not a question of much oil. (*Crosses to* LIFTMAN.) I mean, we're not going to *stay* here. Of course we shall go up in a minute, shan't we, liftman?

LIFTMAN. Can't say, lady.

SUSAN. Don't you think that if you were to open the gates and call up or down, or somewhere, that it might help?

LIFTMAN. Dunno, lady.

SUSAN. Well, isn't it worth trying? I do so believe in trying!

LEONARD (*to* BERT). Trying.

BERT. That's right, sir.

SUSAN. They may not know we've stuck; you see, they may not *know*. Now, don't you think if you called, or if we all called—even *that* gentleman (*points to* LEONARD) can shout—that they would hear us?

LIFTMAN (*utterly uninterested as ever*). They might do.

SUSAN. Well then, come—let's try it.

LIFTMAN. Can't be done, lady.

SUSAN. Why not?

LIFTMAN. I can't open the gates.

SUSAN. Oh, come, that's ridiculous nonsense! I've been in the tube before, you know. I go everywhere! Leonard, explain to this man——

LEONARD (*advancing*). Look here, my man——

SUSAN (*pushes him back*). All right, all right, all right. (*Slight pause.*) Being a duchess has never prevented me from studying human nature. I travel third class, I go in buses, even in trams. And so you see! Besides, I am a socialist. I don't think these distinctions should exist. I consider myself and that young person quite—(*Looking at* NELLY.)

LEONARD (*moving* C.). Susan!

SUSAN. Yes, I do, Leonard. That young person and myself quite the same—and as to you, Leonard, and that gentleman—well, the only difference between you is that he can light a lamp and you can't. Now, in my position——

LIFTMAN (*shouts down the vault*). Hi! Hi!

SUSAN (*stopped abruptly*). Really——

LIFTMAN. Thought I 'eard 'em, but it warn't.

SUSAN (*to* LEONARD). Those are their manners!

LEONARD. Yes, of course. Still, dear, I don't think it's quite the moment to make a speech.

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