

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*) Squeeezy...squeeezy...

SUSAN Squeeezy?

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

SUSAN Sick on the what?

BILL Squeeezy, cow, squeeezy...

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*) Hmm?

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—

