

EXT. THE GARDEN, CHURCHILL - DAY

Reginald and Lady Susan walk along one of the lanes. The park and garden are in the English 18th century style and quite beautiful.

REGINALD

I don't suppose this compares to the French gardens you're familiar with.

LADY SUSAN

It's not Versailles if that's what you mean, and I'm quite glad that it's not.

REGINALD

I would have thought you would prefer the elegance of the French garden.

LADY SUSAN

You seem to have many misconceptions about me, Mr. DeCourcy. On the contrary, I find French gardens rigid and confining. I much prefer the natural freedom of a garden like this.

REGINALD

It is, I believe, a more modern style. But I have to confess that I miss some of the order and structure of our family seat at Parklands. I'm not even sure where we are now.

LADY SUSAN

You lack the spirit of adventure, I see. Well, if it makes you feel any better, you will see the house again in just a moment.

She takes him up another path where the trees part and they have a clear view of the house.

LADY SUSAN

There, you see.

He looks at the house in the distance and then back at Lady Susan.

REGINALD

I find you very puzzling.

LADY SUSAN

(Laughing) I've been described in many ways by many men. But you have

now distinguished yourself, Mr. DeCourcy.

REGINALD

I'm trying to reconcile what I have heard about you with what I have seen over the past couple of days.

LADY SUSAN

And when you do, you will have solved the puzzle, and figured me out, no doubt.

REGINALD

May I speak frankly?

LADY SUSAN

I had rather supposed that you had already taken that liberty, Mr. DeCourcy. But yes, go ahead; we are by way of being family after all.

REGINALD

When I was in London, I heard from someone I considered a reliable source that you had behaved rather badly to two women of his acquaintance--Mrs. and Miss Manwaring--while staying under their very roof.

Lady Susan is furious at what she is hearing, but she controls herself admirably.

REGINALD

Indeed it has been asserted that Mrs. Manwaring was so jealous of your behavior to her husband that she asked you to leave her house.

LADY SUSAN

And pray tell what was my offense to Miss Manwaring? I must have the whole story. It is really quite diverting.

REGINALD

Miss Manwaring claims that you caused Sir James Martin to break off his engagement with her.

LADY SUSAN

I have underestimated my charms it would seem. To turn the head of one man may be considered flirtatious, but to have won two in the same house is positively bewitching. I ask you, Mr. DeCourcy, does this account seem reasonable?

REGINALD

It does seem extraordinary.

LADY SUSAN

Extraordinarily bad, I should say. But you are, I believe, a man of candor. You keep an open mind.

REGINALD

I should hope so.

LADY SUSAN

Then let me say at once that there is no truth whatsoever in the assertion that I was asked to leave the Manwarings. I left of my own accord. But don't take my word for it. Look here.

She pulls out a letter.

LADY SUSAN

Do you see the return direction?

REGINALD

Yes. From Mrs. Manwaring.

LADY SUSAN

I have received many more since arriving here. Do you think Henrietta and I would be corresponding on a regular basis if she were as angry with me as you seem to suppose?

REGINALD

I guess not.

LADY SUSAN

Go ahead, read it. You can see for yourself on what terms of cordiality we remain. Although I should warn you that her letters are full of precisely the sort of gossip that has fostered your preconceptions.

REGINALD

(Handing it back) No, that is hardly necessary. I see I have been misled.

LADY SUSAN

Indeed I think you have. (Smiling almost imperceptibly)

REGINALD

And Miss Manwaring's engagement?

LADY SUSAN

I'm sorry to say that Miss Manwaring is guilty of the same mistake one sees in many a young person—that of mistaking her wishes for the truth. She certainly wished to be engaged to Sir James. He is, after all, a very eligible young man. But she was never successful in her attempts. And Sir James was, in fact, persuaded to turn his attentions elsewhere.

REGINALD

And you were involved in that persuasion?

LADY SUSAN

Oh, yes. I plead guilty. I introduced him to Frederica.

REGINALD

I don't understand.

LADY SUSAN

I take a mother's strong interest in my daughter's future, Mr. DeCourcy. I wish her to be well-married.

REGINALD

So your interest in Sir James was not for yourself, but merely as a suitor to your daughter?

LADY SUSAN

You see me as I am. Have I helped you resolve your puzzlement?

REGINALD

(Thoughtfully) Yes. I see things quite differently now.

LADY SUSAN

I think we can take another path home. There is a lovely view of the drive to be seen from there. And perhaps you wouldn't mind picking some flowers for me as we go.

INT. LADY SUSAN'S BEDROOM, CHURCHILL - DAY

She is arranging flowers in a vase next to her vanity.

LADY SUSAN

What a beautiful bouquet! It smells of friendship and reconciliation.

She looks out the window and sees Reginald riding off with Charles Vernon.

LADY SUSAN

Yes, I think Reginald--Mr. DeCourcy--will prove a very entertaining companion while I'm here. Wholly lacking in Manwaring's charm, of course. But not unhandsome. And he sits very well upon a horse.

She takes out the letter from her dress, smiling as she reads a few lines to herself.

LADY SUSAN

(To the audience) Manwaring writes a letter of such elegant flattery. Thank goodness for country propriety! What would I have done if Reginald had actually chosen to read it?

She smiles to herself and puts the letter in the drawer of the vanity with others.