

## God is normally ...

Three people are seated at a formal dining table. At the head is Wyatt, a retired banker; beside him is his wife, Doris, two or three years younger; and on the other side of the table, but one seat down, is Giselle, whose name is under discussion.

Wyatt        We didn't name you, Giselle, for the ballet. Nothing was further from our minds.

Doris        We had no thought of a headstrong star of stage or screen!

Wyatt        We had in mind the German 'Gisila', from the word for 'pledge'.

Doris        'Gisl'; I've never been able to say it.

Wyatt        We made it easier by naming you in the French form ...

Doris        ... because it's easier to say ...

Wyatt        ... easier to remember ...

Doris        ... and nicer for our friends.

Wyatt        Nicer for Giselle's own friends.

Doris        They're comfortable with your name, I hope?

Giselle      They are.

Doris        Then that's a satisfaction. We've no need to be uneasy about that.

Wyatt        We have no need, my dear, to be uneasy in any way at all.

Giselle      There is no need for any of us to be uneasy.

Wyatt        You have your painting.

Doris        Your duty.

Wyatt        Each of us is life's purpose for the other.

Giselle      I am content.

Doris        You have your hobby, though I'm pleased you keep it to yourself.

Wyatt        It's important, I believe, for our priorities to be clear to everyone ...

Doris        A life needs to be open for examination at every point.

Wyatt        ... and so, when it ends, it needs, merely, to be folded away.

Doris        As we shall be, my dear, do you think?

Wyatt        I believe so, and I hope.

Giselle      Will you read for a while now, Father?

Wyatt        Over coffee, in the lounge.

Giselle      Mother?

Doris        I'll sit with Father while he reads.

Wyatt        (getting up) It's good of you my dear.

Doris        Make yourself comfortable, Father. (to Giselle) Will you go for a walk tonight?

Giselle      Only to the beach, then up and down a tiny way.

Wyatt & Doris go into the lounge. Giselle takes in the tray, then she slips into the night.

Giselle Night loosens my mind. Our houses are undressed, without them knowing. (amused) Such a proper lot they are! Company directors, sitting in a row. I wonder if they're proud of the pictures on their walls? I don't think they'll ever see one of mine. (She studies the fading day.) At school we called it a baton-change. Day takes everything from night, then time, repeating itself, brings back the dark. Colours change ... (Two 1930 motor vehicles pass, headlights on, moving in opposite directions.) Once, when the world was old, people carried lamps. Now we have machines that see. So the world is new, but only when it tells us. We have to watch and wait. (She speaks even more intimately to herself.) Shssssshhh. Colours change as they look over their shoulders. It's their way of disappearing. How shall I put that down? It won't be easy when I have so little time ...

Wyatt I'm ready for bed now, Gisl.

Giselle Coming, Father.

Doris I'll sit a little longer until you're ready for me.

Giselle I'll be quick, Mother.

Doris I sleep easily, knowing that you're watching over us.

Giselle It's my responsibility from God.

Wyatt (out of sight) Amen.

Doris That word will one day bring an end to our lives.

Giselle Then let us be sure that we are ready ... I mean pure enough ... to say it.

Doris Amen.

Giselle Come through, Mother, now. (Doris goes through to prepare herself for bed. There is movement, offstage, then lights are extinguished, and Giselle returns.) My paints are ready. Two canvasses prepared. Choosing the moment is the hardest thing. Or is it keeping my eyes open for that movement in the light? Great forces swirl their fabric and if I miss the glitter I've missed the changing of the day. Only the watchful can know it. Yet it happens every day. God make me quick. Help me notice what you're doing. God touch my brow, I need to sleep.

There is a period of restful quiet, then a cough signals that Wyatt is awake.

Wyatt I'm ready for my tea, Giselle.

Giselle (with a tray) Coming, Father. Good morning, Mother, dear.

Wyatt She hasn't woken yet. Any sugar in that?

Giselle The usual one. Ah, Mother?

Doris Did you sleep well, Wyatt?

Wyatt Like a log.

Doris Indeed. I slept more delicately than that.

Wyatt (jovially) What's more delicate than a log? Almost anything, I suppose!

Doris It's my job to see that everything is well.

Giselle And mine to help you, Mother.

Doris Have you been to the beach this morning, Giselle?

Giselle For a few minutes. It was overcast, then the sun slipped through.

Wyatt And that was good?

Giselle I gave thanks.

Wyatt (thoughtfully) We do well to give thanks.

Giselle So much is shown, if we have eyes to see.

Doris Are you suggesting that some of us don't?

Giselle Our proper state is readiness, I think. That's how God would like us to be.

Doris Ready ... but for what? Our approaching end?

Wyatt We must always be ready for that. But Giselle has something else in mind?

Giselle God needs no applause. But he has given us such a world that we are poor servants if we fail to appreciate.

Doris More tea, Giselle. Did you not notice my need?

Giselle I was thinking about what God wanted of us. I think about it all the time.

Doris (looking at her daughter) What are you looking at, Giselle?

Giselle Light, Mother. The colours in the room. It's God making himself visible.

Doris (suspiciously) Everything looks normal to me.

Giselle God is normally in the room.

Doris Giselle!

Giselle Mother?

Doris Normal people don't say that sort of thing!

Giselle It's about God, and it's true.

Doris God doesn't like to be talked about, darling. He prefers to act out of sight.

Wyatt Or so we understand him. He's got the whole world to manage. He must do many things out of sight. I would if I was him.

Doris Darling, you were an important man, but none of us are *that* important.

Giselle (to herself) Wouldn't it be strange if god got humans to do his painting for him? Painters have to learn, but who could teach god? It doesn't make sense. Painting comes into the world in a mysterious way ...

Doris I've finished, thank you darling. You can clear up now.

Giselle (taking the cups away) There's a meeting in the city this morning to discuss the next exhibition of our group.

Wyatt You need to attend, my dear? (Giselle nods.) I'm sure we can manage for an hour or two. Try not to be long. Doris?

Doris As you say my dear. But the train will take hours.

Giselle Mr Lisson has offered to drive me. He's been staying with a cousin one suburb to our south.

Doris (suspicious) And will he bring you home?

Giselle I'm sure he will ... if I ask.

Doris Bring him in so we can meet him.

Giselle I will most certainly invite him, Mother. But artists insist on making up their own minds.

Wyatt That's all very well if they're *decent* people!

Doris And that's something we don't know!

Giselle I'll make your wishes known. (She goes.)

Doris Lisson. I've never heard of him.

Wyatt Nor have I. Hmmm.

Doris and Wyatt leave. Another early motor vehicle pulls up and out of it steps Peter Lisson, a painter and cartoonist, a wiry figure who gives the impression of not being very biddable in the terms of Wyatt and Doris.

Lisson Any artists heading for town, all aboard!

Giselle Sssshhh!

Lisson No noise, no life in the engine! Simple as that.

Giselle Noise around the corner, silence here.

Lisson Everything out of sight, that's Giselle!

Giselle Sssshhh! If we're doing god's work we can't do any harm.

Lisson You puzzle me. That's such a mysterious idea.

Giselle God works in mysterious ways ...

Lisson (cutting in) ... his wonders to perform. Hop in, Gisl!  
Off to town!

The car drives away, a cuboid box on wheels, and of course black in colour. On comes an aged man, with a deep voice. He introduces himself.

God (amiably) I'm god. You heard them talking about me. People have such ferocious minds. They think I should be as harsh as they are. But when you've been running things as long as I have, you get used to things having minds of their own. There are whole galaxies out there that refuse to spin in the circular style that I favour. I let them go. We haven't had many accidents. Poor Giselle. A wonderful recruit. She knows the changing of the light as well as I do. Morning, noon and night are at her fingers. I love to see her washes of colour, rubbing against each other like clouds on her canvas. Canvas is a pathetic medium compared to sky, but she makes it work. (reflecting) She needs to be a woman. Her parents possess her. Possession is a many-sided thing. You may think I'm here to enforce good behaviour! Rules and laws! They're like walls that hide things as well as block. (reflectively, again) Peter Lisson drives his car as if he's managing his will. When he stops he wants to make love. It's foreign to her nature, but then of course it's not. (getting up) It can't last forever but it has to start somewhere, doesn't it. (He leaves.)

Giselle (naked, in a rug) I've never seen the light as vividly as tonight.

Lisson I've never seen you as clearly as tonight!

Giselle There's so much to reveal!

Lisson        What's wrong with us that we hide? There's something wrong, wrong, wrong!

Giselle        It's strange. It's nothing like what I imagined.

Lisson        How did you imagine it? For that matter, how has it been for you?

Giselle        I'm expanding, to take in the new.

Lisson        We don't want you expanding down here. (patting her) I'm taking care as best I can.

Giselle        I'm terrified of conceiving a child, and I'm terrified of not.

Lisson        Of not?

Giselle        It's what I'm made to do.

Lisson        We don't have to if we don't want to. It's called 'timely intervention'.

Giselle        Where's your car?

Lisson        Couple of blocks away. I didn't want anyone to see me getting here.

Giselle        We're secret lovers, then. (He says nothing.) In my pride – oh shame for my pride – I want to tell the world. And I have a household to maintain, where everything is done in a certain way. Tea at a certain hour, clothes to wash and iron. Clothes to put away.

Lisson        So bloody respectable, and one enormous denial!

Giselle        Mother and Father made me.

Lisson        What did they make? (He unwraps the rug around her and they look at each other.) We need to join. We're joined.

Wyatt        (some way off) I'm ready for my tea, Giselle.

Giselle        Coming, Father.

She slips out of Lisson's grip, then wraps herself in the rug again. Lisson disappears, while Giselle, looking distinctly immodest to the audience but apparently not to her parents, takes in the morning tea.

Wyatt        Did you visit the beach this morning?

Giselle        Very early. The dark was wonderful. There were lights across the bay.

Doris        At Port Melbourne?

Giselle        There's a liner in the harbour. It's never entirely dark.

Wyatt        Big ships never are.

Giselle        They have big journeys. I have a little one.

Doris        That's what I'm concerned about.

Giselle        Mother?

Doris        Aren't you worried, Wyatt?

Wyatt        Why, my love? Why?

Doris        I don't know what you're painting any more. I don't know why you're painting.

Giselle        The same reason as before.

Doris        Nothing's changed?

Giselle        It's still god working in me.

Doris        I wondered if god might have become a man.

Giselle        God? God is god is god ...

Doris        Whatever that means!

Wyatt Don't be too insistent, darling. We do like what Giselle paints, after all.

Doris (scornfully, but submitting) Painting ...

God reappears as the trio of parents and daughter disappear.

God I'm aware there are people who don't believe in me. Yes, quite possibly here among you. But don't get out of your seats in protest, I don't mind. I give you all the proof you need, and if you choose to overlook it, what is that to me? (He introduces a sort of colour-and-light show.) You think dark's one thing. Here's a blue thing in the dark. Here's a yellow. Now! Here's a silver, slipping through. See?

Giselle What a trick! (She starts to paint.)

God If you live for ever you need your tricks. Too boring, otherwise. (demonstrating with colours) The white of a railing, grey of boards, blue of shallow water. Ah! (He notices that Giselle has done a painting of a pier, stretched daintily across some rippling water.) She doesn't let you see the sand. Clever. I should have had her round when I was creating. But the only human advice I had was the Pope's. Oops! What did I say? (turning to his beloved artist) Night, Giselle, night. You've given us the day. (Giselle puts a few splashes of light paint on the darkness indicating city lights, and darkens the darkness to suggest a verandah and the shape of a bus. God reflects on his pupil's methods.) She finished that

with two flicks of her brush then got on the bus. Home. To Mummy and Daddy, such a demanding pair. They love their daughter, but they chain her to them, night and day. As for that lover of hers ... keep painting, Giselle, what about one from the middle of the day, when you rarely get any time? ... that man of hers ... she doesn't let him close enough to do her any harm. I must say that as the ruler of the universe this is a matter on which I've never made up my mind. I think I buggered things up because I wasn't a woman myself.

Giselle (pointing to a painting) Street scene.

God Lovely, darling.

Giselle (to another) Flood.

God That was last week. I dropped my watering can, what a mess.

Giselle Beach box, Beaumaris.

God Thank god ... oops, thank something ... for a commoner's point of view. There's a world of lords and castles that I never go near. Keep things simple, is what I would say. If it's hard to bring off, don't put it in my bowl. I don't want to lick. A plain, broad spoon is my preferred utensil ...

Giselle keeps showing him paintings – a couple of boats, a car moving away, a street sloping towards the bay, a blurry figure or two, mostly done early or late in the day, with an occasional escape into the brightness of noon.

God Small, that's how I like paintings done. It means modesty, a delicacy I enjoy. (He disappears.)

Wyatt I'd love a cup of tea, Giselle, if you're not too busy.

Doris I'd prefer coffee, darling, and I'm sorry to bother you, but I wasn't able to get your father to change his mind.

Giselle Coming, Father. Coffee, Mother, of course!

Wyatt She's a fountain of virtue, that girl. I don't know how we produced her!

Doris Training, my husband and my lord, most of it done out of sight of you!

Wyatt If you say so, my love.

Giselle Tea. Coffee. At your service.

Wyatt My beloved daughter. What did I say?

Doris What did you say?

Giselle What are you thinking of, Father?

Wyatt Remember my words: each of us is life's purpose for the other?

Giselle (accepting) Father.

Doris A trinity of purposes, but is there one that rules, as in heaven?

Wyatt And if there were, my love: if there were?

Giselle Each of us must take our turn, giving way, one to the other, as we must.

Doris It's hard, but satisfying, in the end ...

Lisson (at the side, frustrated and angry) What's the good of me getting here at all hours of night or morning when I don't know if she's going to come?

Giselle He wants us to be naked as gods but I only believe in one.

God appears, with a trestle, on which he puts Giselle's pictures, one after the other.

God Let him have a few fucks, Giselle. You'll know him for what he is.

Giselle It's nice when god speaks to me, but night and day are enough.

God With a few from the middle of the day. Don't forget those.

Giselle (speaking to her lover) Next week Peter, Father and Mother are going to a bankers' reunion. They'll be away for the whole of the day.

Lisson Thank the lord for that.

God Nothing to do with me, dear boy.

Lisson We can spend the whole day together.

Giselle ... after I've cleaned their rooms. I'll have my chance to turn everything upside down!

Lisson For Christ's sake! Slam the door and come with me. I'll drive you down to the Heads, we'll see the ocean going in and out. It's the very edge of your world and you'll know it because of me!

God (looking at pictures) Go to the Heads with him, darling. It's a good idea.

Giselle Will you be here when I get back? You won't desert me?

God Would I desert you, my love? It's not within my power.

Lisson Next week then, lover mine?

Giselle When the good lord makes it possible.

Wyatt I'm going to have a sleep now, darling. No noises in the kitchen, please.

Giselle And you, Mother, will you take a nap too?

Doris When your Father says sleep, I sleep. It's my condition.

Lisson I could meet you down the beach, we could slip away for a drive ...

Giselle Let's paint tonight, at the fading of the day.

Lisson That sounds ominous, to me.

Giselle Only if you think god's ominous, and he's never seemed so to me.

God Thank you, my darling. I'll turn on something good for you, tonight.