

## **The characters in the story**

### **Sandra**

Sandra is the first character we meet. Although this is a short story, we see how Sandra changes in the course of an afternoon. Outwardly she is unremarkable – she expects to be a secretary – but we note little details in the course of the story: Mrs. Rutter says that she is pretty, while someone else once remarked on her attractive feet; she makes her own clothes and dreams of having her own sewing machine; she judges Kerry at first by his appearance; she is superstitious about the wood.

When Kerry asks Mrs. Rutter about the war, Sandra does not want to listen – she tells him to “Shut up”. Why is this? Is she frightened? Is she superstitious? Is there some other reason?

Perhaps Sandra is more important as someone who observes and learns from things. She moves from a childish fear of rumours and tall stories to a realistic horror at the real darkness or evil in the world. “You could get people all wrong...” Does this refer to Mrs. Rutter, to Kerry, to both of them, or to all sorts of people, including these two? And is it right?

### **Kerry**

Sandra does not really know Kerry, but she shares her friends’ opinion of him – “Kerry Stevens that none of her lot reckoned much on.” But at the end of the story she changes her mind. Why is this? Kerry seems a bit of a stereotype – he works part-time in a garage, and will have a full-time job there when he leaves school. He identifies Sandra’s dad by the make and colour of his car.

But there are clues that suggest Kerry is not as Sandra sees him – for example, he is ready to spend his free time helping old people, and he asks Mrs. Rutter what she wants them to do, then gets on with it steadily.

At the end of the story it is Kerry who takes the initiative, and passes judgement on Mrs. Rutter. In Sandra’s eyes “he had grown; he had got older and larger...”

### **Mrs. Rutter**

Mrs. Rutter is the opposite of Kerry in a way. Pat calls her a “dear old thing”. She looks like the stereotype of a sweet old lady, calling Sandra “dear” and asking her if she is “courting”. She seems very interested in marriage and people’s having children. It may be that her own childlessness is something for which she blames the Germans, but she says she was a widow at thirty-nine, so it seems likely that she would not have had children anyway. She claims “I’ve got a sympathy with young people”. Perhaps she quite likes young people but she does not really have sympathy with them, as she is bitter and vengeful. Gradually her real character is revealed.