

Breaking News

A comedy in one act
Written by Helena Sheridan

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CAST

Philip Appleton. 50 years old. Scots accent. Smart casual clothes. Non-assertive, dominated by his wife. A bit of an idealist.

Olivia Appleton. 47 years old. Affected, polite Scots accent. Dressed in classic skirt suit. Quite severe and dated hairstyle. Argumentative and considers she is always right.

Stanley Appleton. 75 year old. Widower. Ayrshire accent. Lively, comical disposition. Enjoys winding up his daughter-in-law Olivia , who he considers represents everything he hates.

Meredith Thompson. 73 years old. Widow. Cheerful, friendly disposition. A peacemaker. Dressed in slacks and bright jumper - quite young attitude.

Cassy Bradshaw. Mid/late 30s. Scottish. Happy-go-lucky, chatty person. Dressed in casual gear, e.g. sweat shirt and trousers, trainers.

Scene opens to reveal a living room with slightly dated furnishings covered in dust cloths. The walls have been partially scraped and there is an upset ladder lying in the middle of the floor. A young woman is standing talking to a middle-aged couple

Cassy Sorry to bring you down all this way. It's such a rotten night too, but I didn't know who else to contact. I found your name on the direct dial ... *(points to phone)*.

Philip No, that's fine. *(Gestures to Olivia)* We're very grateful you did.

Cassy When I looked in the window and saw your poor dad lying there, face down with his arms sort of ... *(she demonstrates arms outspread at odd angles)* Oh. *(Shivers)* Just as well I called round to get his Red Cross envelope otherwise goodness knows when I'd have found him. I don't get to see much of Mr Appleton these days. Life's so busy. I guess he must get lonely, what with you both living away up near Edinburgh. *(Nods towards upturned ladder)* Must have decided on doing a spot of DIY.

Olivia *(angrily)* Honestly. What he was thinking about climbing a ladder at his age?

Philip places a restraining hand over Olivia's arm

Cassy Mm. But it's difficult for older people. My own nan's in one of those homes. Mum says it's the best idea under the circumstances. *(Whispers)* Nan's getting a bit forgetful. Sad, really. *(Pauses very briefly)* She just sits there, hour after hour, in one of those winged chairs, staring. You wonder what she's thinking. It must be awful to get old and lonely.

Olivia *(interrupting as she forcefully draws her arm away from Philip's grasp)* Well, much more of this carry-on *(gazes about the upset room)* and we may have to rethink Stanley's situation.

Cassy *(amused)* Oh no. I think there's still a lot of life left in Mr Appleton yet. Maybe when he's up and about again he can come and stay with you for a bit. Make a nice wee change for him.

Philip gives a half hearted nod

Olivia *(interrupting)* Well we best not keep you back any longer. Don't you think you should be phoning the hospital, Philip?

Philip Er ...

Olivia *(firmly)* The hospital. Now.

Philip Oh yes. We should let them know we're here.

Olivia *(steering Cassy to the door as she speaks)* Thank you for your help, um ...

Cassy Cassy. Cassy Bradshaw. *(Calls over to Philip who has moved over to the phone)* Remember. If you need anything, just call. I'm two doors down. Number 5.

Philip *(somewhat flirtatiously)* Right. Got ya!

Olivia *(impatiently looks at her watch)* It's getting late, Philip.

Philip *(gestures to Cassy with phone)* Guess I'd better ... see you, Cassy. Thanks.

Cassy *(still talking as she goes out the door)* I've left the hospital details on the table. The medics said he might need to stay in overnight. Just in case of any after effects I suppose, you know, shock or that. You can never be too careful when they're getting on a bit.

Olivia *(clearly anxious to close the door on Cassy)* Right. Fine.

Cassy *(one last call over to Philip)* Bye!

Philip *(with a childish wave)* Bye!

Olivia closes the door and stands with her back to it

Olivia Thank God! I thought she'd never go. As if we haven't enough on our plates. *(Crossing to Philip)* You should have just nipped it in the bud, told her straight, we have things to do, but oh no, you kept wittering on.

Philip Oh come on, Olivia. She had just helped us out. I was just trying to be civil.

Olivia Civil? *(Imitates Philip's childish voice & wave)* Bye! What was all that about?

Philip *(smirks)* I think she quite fancied me.

Olivia Don't be ridiculous! What is it with you lately, Philip, some midlife crisis or something? A woman so much as glances at you and you think she's eyeing you up. *(Scoffs)* Get back to reality! There's a

mirror in the hall. I suggest you take a long hard look at yourself.

Philip (*obviously cut up at her blunt remark*) Do you always have to be so ... (*Sighs*) I'm just saying she seemed to enjoy my company, that's all.

Olivia That woman would enjoy talking to a blank wall. Clearly she loves the sound of her own voice!

Philip (*turning away as he mutters*) She's not the only one.

Olivia What?!

Philip Er ... (*Lifts the piece of paper from the table and improvises*) There's only one ... number ... for the hospital.

Olivia Well that's all you'll need. (*Sighs*) Honestly I'd be quicker doing it myself but I feel one of my heads coming on. (*Rummaging in her handbag*) Where did I put them? (*Continues to rummage*) And did you hear the cheek of her? Assuming we'll take Stanley back with us. Not if I have anything to do with it. He's much too demanding. (*She brings out a bottle of pills*) At last. Get me some water, Philip.

Philip sighs and exits stage left

(*Calls after him*) A clean glass, mind, and run the tap for a bit. (*Sighs as she opens the bottle of pills*) If that man only knew what he puts me through. If it's not one thing it's another.

Philip returns with a glass of water and hands it to Olivia who examines it

I'm telling you, Philip, he can't be left alone any more.

She swallows the tablet and takes a drink and winces at the after-taste then continues talking before Philip gets a chance to reply

And we're not having him!

Philip Be reasonable, Vi. (*Trying to sound determined*) I can't see him sick and alone. He's my dad.

Olivia Listen here, Philip Appleton. This isn't some lost pup you want to drag home. This is a living breathing pain in the neck. I know how it will be. Television blaring day and night and fag ash ground into my new carpet, which you'll both expect me to clean up!

Philip Okay. I know you two don't exactly see eye to eye but ...

Olivia (*raises her hand in objection*) No buts. I mean it, Philip. Him or me.

Philip For God's sake, I feel bad enough that we haven't managed to get down to see him before now. It's been almost three months. No wonder he tried doing this (*gestures to walls*) on his own.

Olivia And I can just hear his voice. (*Mimics*) "If I waited for you I'd wait forever!" Emotional blackmail, that's what it is. Why can't you see that?

Philip Well he is getting on a bit. I feel I owe him something.

Olivia Oh what? So now we're not entitled to a life of our own? We're expected to be there at his beck and call?

Philip I didn't say that.

Olivia Right. If you want to feel guilty about him, then fine, do that, but leave me out of it. (*Sighs, then extended pause*) It's not as if we haven't offered to help. You gave him your old computer, and we even asked him to move up to Edinburgh when we went, but no, he wouldn't have a bit of it. Stubborn to the last!

Philip moves to drinks cabinet and pours himself a sizeable whisky

Philip (*quietly but firmly*) I asked him

Olivia What's that?

Philip It was me who actually asked him to join us. (*Downs drink before continuing*) I said we'd love you to come but he knew you weren't keen. He has his pride, I suppose.

Olivia throws her arms up in exasperation

Olivia Oh I see. So it's all my fault. Blame the wicked daughter-in-law yet again. I'm over sixty miles

away and yet somehow, magically, I'm still responsible for all this ... *(waves her arms about the upset room)* bloody chaos!

Philip Look, I don't know why you're getting so upset about all this, Vi. Chances are he'll be fine.

Olivia Oh aye, he'll be fine and I'll nearly have a damned breakdown. Isn't that always the way? Well, I've had enough, Philip. Face it. He's a ... a hazard. Something needs to be done.

There is a silence for a moment. Philip moves to the fireplace and gazes in at the darkened ashes

Philip I remember when I was wee I used to hang my Christmas stocking up on this mantle. *(Runs his hand affectionately along the wood)* It was all so ... exciting. Well it is when you're a kid, isn't it? You believe in everything. *(Sighs)* Everyone. Happy endings. Whatever happened to them, eh?

Olivia See, that's your trouble, Philip. You've never really grown up. You live in this *dream world* where you think fate will do all the work for you. No hassle, no ... push. You just wake up one morning and it's all there for you. Well, take it from me, it isn't like that. I never had anything handed to me when I was a kid. Happy endings!?! What the hell were they?

Philip Look, I know things were tough back then ...

Philip moves away from fireplace and stoops to kiss Olivia on the cheek, but she turns away

Olivia Tough?! Moved from pillar to post. No real foundation, no real family. I learned young. You take what you want in this world, Philip, for as sure as hell no-one's going to give it to you, and once you've got it, hold tight!

Philip *(sighs)* But no-one's trying to take anything from you now. You've got me. Our home.

Olivia *Our* home, right, which is about to be invaded, *taken over*, by your dad. No. It's not going to happen.

Philip *(mutters angrily)* What's the point?

He moves back to drinks cabinet and pours himself another drink

Suddenly the front door opens and Stanley Appleton appears in a wheelchair. His leg is in plaster but he is laughing with an elderly lady who is pushing the chair inside. Olivia and Philip look on in surprise. Philip has the whisky bottle still in his hand

Stanley *(gesturing to the bottle)* Oh aye, I see I'm no the only one that's plastered!

Meredith *(giggles and nudges him playfully)* Oh, what are you like?

Philip Dad? I ... I thought you were staying in the hospital. That woman ... your neighbour, she said they might keep you in overnight.

Stanley You mean, Cassy? Isn't she a gem? I don't know what I would have done if she hadn't found me. *(He pauses briefly and goes quiet)*

Meredith pats Stanley's shoulder

Meredith *(to Philip & Olivia)* It's a clean break but it will take a fair while to mend though. Still the doctor said he could come home.

Stanley *(adding quickly)* So long as I have someone to look after me. I said that wouldn't be a problem.

Olivia pulls Philip forcefully by the shirt sleeve and gives him a warning look

Olivia *(muttering to Philip)* Well it certainly isn't going to be us. Tell him, Philip. Go on, tell him.

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This engaging comedy by Helena Sheridan gained First Prize in the Scottish Association of Writers drama awards, and has since been adapted and excerpts made into a short film by students of the Performing Arts Department at Ayr College.

Plot Summary

Pensioner Stanley Appleton has fallen off a ladder and broken his leg while attempting a spot of DIY. His well-meaning neighbour, Cassy Bradshaw, has phoned for an ambulance to take him to hospital and contacted his son Philip and daughter-in-law Olivia, in Edinburgh. Olivia dislikes Stanley and wants him placed in a home for the elderly. Philip disagrees, but finds it hard to stand up to his overbearing wife. Stanley has his own ideas, and shocks them both by announcing his engagement to Meredith Thompson. However, he is not the only one with a secret!

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