

# **A Family Matter**

**A drama in one act**

**By Peter Pitt**

**Spotlight Publications**

## **A Family Matter**

CAST (in order of appearance)

**Helen**, 35, nicely made up and smartly dressed.

**Ann**, Helen's sister, 33, less sophisticated.

**Father**, 70, in poor health.

**David**, 40, solicitor.

**Mrs Foster**, 60, shop assistant.

**Setting** - A living room at the rear of a corner shop

**Time** - About 1980

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*A room behind a corner shop. It is furnished with a dining room table and four chairs. Also a couple of easy chairs. In one of these chairs an old man (Father), is stretched out, asleep. At one side of the set there is a kitchen area with a sink and an electric kettle. There are two doors, the one at the back leading to the shop and the other at the side leading to the upstairs accommodation. The shop door has a glass top which is covered by a lace curtain. On the wall close to this door hangs a wall telephone*

*Sound of the shop door bell followed by voices and movement*

**Helen** *(off)* Hello, Mrs Foster.

**Mrs Foster** *(off)* I Hello, Helen, how are you?

**Helen** *(off)* I'm alright, thanks, and yourself?

**Mrs Foster** *(off)* I mustn't grumble, I suppose.

*The door from the shop opens and Mrs Foster, a lady in her sixties, wearing an overall, enters. She is followed by Helen, who is in her middle thirties. She is smartly dressed and is carrying a suitcase and a holdall*

**Mrs Foster** Shush, your father's asleep.

**Helen** My God, he looks so old.

**Mrs Foster** He's got much worse in the last few weeks. And he would look older to you. When was the last you saw him?

**Helen** *(choosing to ignore the question)* Ann, upstairs?

**Mrs Foster** She's gone to the bank, she should be back in a minute.

**Helen** Fine.

**Mrs Foster** Did I see David Young dropping you off?

**Helen** *(sarcastically)* Surely you saw him taking my suitcase out of the boot of his car?

**Mrs Foster** Hmm, I thought it was him.

**Helen** *(smiling)* He gave me a lift from the station. Is that alright?

**Mrs Foster** It's nothing to do with me.

*She starts to go back to the shop, then turns back to Helen*

Since he returned to Bletchley, Ann's been seeing quite a lot of him

**Helen** Has she really.

**Mrs Foster** Well I just wanted to tell you to ...

*The shop bell interrupts her*

**Helen** The shop, I think.

*Mrs Foster goes back into the shop. The sound of the door closing arouses Father*

**Father** Who's that?

**Helen** Hello, Dad.

**Father** Helen!

**Helen** How are you feeling, Dad?

**Father** Where's Ann?

**Helen** She's gone to the bank.

**Father** What are you doing here?

**Helen** I've come to see you. Didn't Ann tell you I was coming?

**Father** Oh yes. *(Pause)* No children yet, I suppose?

**Helen** No, you know I haven't.

**Father** Is Frank with you?

**Helen** We were divorced two years ago.

**Father** Oh yes. *(Pause)* Anyway, It's getting too much for her.

**Helen** What is?

**Father** The shop.

**Helen** Well, you've still got Mrs Foster.

**Father** She works too hard.

**Helen** Mrs Foster?

**Father** No no, your mother. We should have sold the shop years ago. I wanted to move down to the coast.

**Helen** Then why didn't you?

**Father** She wouldn't let me. Wanted to keep it going for Ann. You have a word with her.

**Helen** Listen, Dad. (*Gently*) Mum died almost two years ago.

*Ann enters from the shop. She goes over to Helen and embraces her*

**Ann** Helen, I'm sorry I wasn't there when you arrived.

**Helen** That's alright.

**Ann** I waited at the bank until the rain had stopped.

**Helen** I've only been here a few minutes.

**Ann** Anyway, it's lovely to see you again.

**Helen** Likewise. It's been a long time.

**Ann** You're looking good. I like what you're wearing.

**Helen** Thank you.

**Ann** I'll put the kettle on. I expect you could do with a cup.

*Ann goes to the kitchen area and fills the kettle with water. Father starts to get up from his chair*

**Ann** Where do you think you're going, Dad?

**Father** To bed, I'm tired.

**Ann** You've not had your lunch yet, it won't be long, but I'm making a cup of tea now for all of us.

**Father** I don't want a cup of tea.

**Ann** Don't you want to stay and talk some more with Helen?

**Father** No. I want to go upstairs.

*Father stumbles slightly. Helen rushes to help him. Ann comes over and takes hold of his arm*

**Ann** Very well, I'll help you upstairs.

**Father** Don't need help, I'm alright.

*Father walks unsteadily towards the door. Ann opens and closes it after he exits*

**Ann** You can see why I've arranged for him to go into a home. It's been getting too much for me to cope with.

**Helen** I didn't realise he was as bad as this.

**Ann** He isn't like this all the time. He's often perfectly rational for hours, sometimes even for days. It's those times I feel so guilty about putting him in a home.

**Helen** Obviously, you can't manage him and also run the shop. Does Dad know he's going into a home?

**Ann** Oh yes, he's been very good about it. I think he realises he needs professional care.

**Helen** Was it Mum's death that brought this on?

**Ann** He was becoming senile before she died, but he's got much worse.

**Helen** You didn't tell me at the time.

**Ann** Well we didn't really talk, did we?

**Helen** I know. I apologise for my brief appearance at the funeral, I was so busy at the gallery and I had to leave for New York the following day.

**Ann** You did tell me.

**Helen** I'm sorry. (*Pause*) I'll take my things upstairs.

**Ann** You're in your old room.

**Helen** I'll be down for the tea.

*Helen picks up her luggage. Ann opens the door for her*

**Ann** I need to close it after you, otherwise it slams if the shop door is opened.

**Helen** I remember it well.

*Ann closes the door and stands for a moment looking pensive. The door from the shop opens and Mrs Foster enters*

**Mrs Foster** I just sold the last of these very large envelopes. Will you be getting any more?

**Ann** I won't be buying any more stationery. May as well let the stock run down. Mr Patel may want to stock different lines.

**Mrs Foster** I shouldn't be at all surprised.

**Ann** Helen doesn't change, does she? Always looks so smart.

**Mrs Foster** (*slightly hushed tone*) David Young dropped her outside.

**Ann** (*matter of fact*) Did he.

**Mrs Foster** She said he gave her a lift from the station.

**Ann** Oh, that was nice.

**Mrs Foster** You'll have to watch her, or she'll be taking him away from you.

**Ann** What are you talking about? He doesn't belong to me. And I'm quite able to look after myself, thank you.

**Mrs Foster** No offence meant, Ann. I've only your interests at heart. I'd just like to see you settled down.

**Ann** I know.

**Mrs Foster** (*glancing round the room*) Sad to think all this is going to change. I shan't know where I am, not coming here daily.

**Ann** I'm sorry. But with Mum gone and Dad going into a home, I didn't want to carry on here.

**Mrs Foster** I understand.

**Ann** And it's just not profitable any more. I can earn more working in an office than I can running this shop.

**Mrs Foster** I suppose Mr Patel will make it pay by opening all hours of the day and night.

**Ann** Probably. Will you be looking for another job?

**Mrs Foster** Who'd have me at my age?

**Ann** I did try to get him to keep you on.

**Mrs Foster** I know you did. Although I'm not sure I'd want to. I expect the place will reek with curry, and I can't abide that stuff.

**Ann** I'm making a cup of tea. Will you have one?

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### **Synopsis**

After a disappointing love affair, Helen returns to the corner shop where she lived as a child, and where her sister, Ann, still lives with her ailing father. In a heart-to-heart talk, the sisters reveal some home truths about their past relationship, and also hear some shocking news.

Running time: 30 minutes