

script sample

Mrs Holt

a play

by **Trevor Alan Chilver**

Mrs Holt

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SCENE EIGHT

ZARA's room. ZARA sits in her chair wearing a blue dress. She is not doing anything, just waiting. She twiddles her thumbs a little, but exudes an air of patience rather than impatience. RACHEL enters, carrying a Tupperware container of biscuits, and moves towards ZARA, who doesn't notice her until she is quite close.

RACHEL

Hi Nan.

ZARA

Oh, Katy. Hello dear. Sorry; Linda. No, Rachel. Sorry.

RACHEL (*handing her the Tupperware container*)

Mum sent you some biscuits, Nan. (*she goes to get a chair from near the wardrobe*).

ZARA (*taking and opening the container*)

Oh, melting moments, my favourite. Tell her thank you, dear. That's lovely. (*she puts the container down on the table beside her chair*)

RACHEL

I think there might be a promotion in the wind, Nan. Brad sat me down yesterday and wanted to know my (*for this next phrase she bungs on a mock serious voice*) plans for the future. Had a long chat, we did. He was a bit awkward, though.

ZARA

Did he ask you to marry him?

RACHEL

Nan!

ZARA

Don't know what's wrong with the man.

RACHEL

There's nothing wrong, he's a businessman. I'm an employee, not a skirt.

ZARA

You might get further if you wore a skirt occasionally.

RACHEL

Honestly, Nan, sometimes you're so old!

ZARA

I'm eighty-two, what do you expect?

RACHEL

You don't act eighty-two.

ZARA

Are you trying to tell me to act my age?

RACHEL

Women don't have to do that sort of thing anymore.

ZARA

See, that's your trouble right there. Think you can just do what you like. Well we could do that in my day too, but there were consequences. For every action there is a reaction.

Mrs Holt

RACHEL

So now you're going to teach me about the laws of motion? I did that in high school.

ZARA

Well you should have paid more attention. You might not be heading for spinsterhood.

RACHEL laughs.

ZARA

Oh, yes laugh it up.

RACHEL

No one talks about spinsterhood anymore, Nan.

ZARA

That doesn't mean no one suffers it.

RACHEL

Look, Nan, I would love to find the right guy and get married and have kids, but not at the expense of my career. I wanted to be a lawyer, like Uncle Mark. I now work at one of the biggest law firms in Sydney, and there is the distinct possibility that in the next decade, there will come a time when I can go into a courtroom and not have to prove myself to all the boys.

ZARA

There is also the distinct possibility that if you don't prove yourself to one of those boys soon you'll never have kids.

RACHEL

And so what if I don't? That lifestyle is not what I've chosen.

ZARA

What? Getting married, having kids, stopping your complaining and living a happy life?

RACHEL

Those things don't often come as a package, Nan.

ZARA

They did for me.

RACHEL

That's history, Nan.

ZARA

Your Papa was a whiz in bed.

RACHEL

Oh Nan, please!

ZARA

Well he was. (*a pause*) Not that I had anything to compare him to, mind. Still, I know what I felt.

RACHEL

Nan!

ZARA

Maybe you should ask Brad out yourself. He seems a bit of a slow one.

RACHEL

I was trying to tell you about my promotion.

Mrs Holt

ZARA

Promotion: is that what you call it these days?

RACHEL

No; a real promotion. They are moving me into casework.

ZARA

Boring!

RACHEL

Nan, this is what I've been working towards for the last ten years.

ZARA

Is that why you're not married?

RACHEL

I don't want to get married, Nan, not until I've got this promotion. I wanted you to be happy for me. I drove all the way out here just to see you and tell you about it.

ZARA

Well I'm sorry it's such a chore for you. Perhaps you should get going, so you don't waste your whole Saturday afternoon in Penrith when you could be back on the bloody north shore.

RACHEL

Oh, don't be so difficult, Nan. That's where I get it from.

ZARA

You do not! It's on your mother's side.

JACK (*entering with a pile of washing and heading for the wardrobe*)

Clean washing, Mrs Holt! (*he notices RACHEL, and stops for a moment*) Oh, hi. You must be Mrs Holt's great granddaughter. I'm Jack.

RACHEL

Oh, no, I'm her...

JACK

Oh! I'm sorry; her great great granddaughter

ZARA

I'm not that old, boy.

RACHEL

Don't try to come on to me. I just want Nan looked after properly.

JACK

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

RACHEL

Yeah, I know. You were dropping off Nan's washing?

JACK

Yeah, I...

ZARA

Rachel, mind your manners.

RACHEL (*mellowing*)

Look, I don't know if you've spoken to Julie, but I'm not trying to be difficult, I just expect a nurse to do her job and make sure my Nan's looked after.

JACK

His job.

RACHEL (*realising her faux pas and overreacting*)

Oh, I'm so sorry! I don't normally do things like that, I...

JACK (*he interrupts and offers his hand*)

Jack.

RACHEL (*shaking his hand*)

Rachel.

JACK

Look, I just plan to make your Nan as comfortable as possible.

ZARA *stifles a laugh.*

RACHEL

I'm sure you will. I'm in the habit of being too defensive.

ZARA (*under her breath*)

That's an understatement.

JACK

It's alright. I'm in the habit of being too precocious.

There is an awkward moment, then JACK turns and quickly distributes the clothes to various parts of the wardrobe. ZARA winks at RACHEL.

RACHEL

You behave yourself, Nan.

JACK *finishes distributing the washing, and turns to say goodbye.*

ZARA

Thank you, Jack.

JACK *nods and exits.*

RACHEL

Bye Jack.

JACK

Bye.

RACHEL (*ignoring her*)

See? Aren't you glad I insisted they change your nurse?

ZARA

Over the moon, girl.

RACHEL (*taking the chair back towards the wardrobe an getting the walking frame*)

Come on, Nan, let's go get some coffee.

ZARA

I don't want coffee.

RACHEL (*bringing the walking frame towards ZARA*)

Tea, then.

Mrs Holt

ZARA (*turning her head away from the frame*)
I don't want tea.

RACHEL
Well we're going for a walk, anyway. Up you get.

ZARA *does not move.*

RACHEL
How about I sign you out and we go across the road for a beer?

ZARA *places her hands on the walking frame and slowly begins to stand.*

RACHEL
There's only one way to get you out of here sometimes.

ZARA
Don't be ridiculous, I need the exercise. I'll only have an orange juice.

RACHEL
Yes, Nan. I know all about your 'orange juices'.

ZARA
A girl's allowed to enjoy herself when she's raised her family.

RACHEL
Yes, Nan.

ZARA
No 'orange juice' for you.

RACHEL
The day will come.

ZARA
Not if you don't do something about it. You've got a long way to go, girl.

RACHEL
Yes, Nan.

ZARA
Better get started.

RACHEL
Yes, Nan.

ZARA
I'm talking about Brad, not Jack.

RACHEL
Oh, Jack's yours, is he?

ZARA
Don't be ridiculous, Rachel.

ZARA *has been struggling to stand, with RACHEL's help, and at this point she gives a short sharp yelp of pain and sits back onto the bed. RACHEL immediately presses the buzzer.*

RACHEL
What is it?

Mrs Holt

ZARA

Nothing. Give me a minute.

JACK enters.

JACK

What is it?

RACHEL

She was standing up, and stopped in pain.

JACK

Where is it Mrs Holt?

ZARA

I'm fine. I didn't ring the buzzer. Have a look at her and find out what's wrong with her!

JACK

Let's get you back in bed.

ZARA

No, I need to go to the toilet.

JACK

I'll get you a pan.

ZARA (sharply)

No you won't. I will go to the toilet.

RACHEL

Nan, let him get you a pan.

ZARA

Shut up Katy.

JACK

Rachel.

ZARA

Oh why don't you both shut up. (*again she attempts to stand*)

JACK takes her arms and helps her up. She stands, groaning, and takes hold of her walking frame.

JACK

I should get the doctor up.

ZARA

You should shut your trap and help me to the toilet.

JACK leads ZARA away to the 'toilet' door.

RACHEL

Nan, let him get the doctor.

ZARA

I don't need a doctor, I need to go to the toilet.

JACK

Now, now, Mrs Holt, that's where we're getting you. We can worry about the doctor afterwards.

Mrs Holt

A few more steps. They're at the toilet door.

ZARA

Right, I'm fine now.

JACK

You know I can't let you go by yourself.

ZARA

An old woman needs her privacy!

JACK

I've been taking old women to the toilet for years.

ZARA

Says a lot.

JACK

I take you to the toilet all the time! I showered you this morning!

RACHEL

Why don't I come?

JACK

No, I have to. It's an insurance thing. Bloody lawyers think they know better than anyone else.

ZARA

Neither of you are coming in here!

JACK

Rachel, Julie's just next door, could you ask her to come and help?

RACHEL nods and exits.

ZARA

I don't need anyone to help me.

JACK

We're not insured if you break your neck, Mrs Holt, so you don't really have a choice.

JULIE enters, followed closely by RACHEL.

JULIE

Having some troubles, Mrs Holt?

ZARA

No, and I don't need any help.

JULIE

I know you don't, I'll just watch you don't hurt yourself.

JACK

Do you need me to do anything for Mrs Kirkland while you're in here?

JULIE

No, she's fine.

JULIE takes over from JACK, taking ZARA into the toilet and closing the door. JACK smiles awkwardly at RACHEL.

Mrs Holt

RACHEL

I'm sorry, I guess it must be a little awkward for you too, having to take over when I complained about her.

JACK

Julie's a great nurse.

RACHEL

Nan just doesn't seem to be doing well lately.

JACK (*gently despite the gravity of the information*)

She's not doing well. The doctors have spoken to you, haven't they?

RACHEL

Yeah, we know, she hasn't got long left. That's why I come in all the time. That's why I care about what nurse she has.

Pause.

JACK

Look, a nurse can make a mistake or two, but there are times when you can do everything right and it just doesn't help.

RACHEL

Still, I'm glad you're looking after her.

JACK

She's a lot of fun really. She'll take whatever I can dish out, which is a nice change.

There is an awkward silence.

JACK

I should wait until she's out.

RACHEL

Of course.

Pause.

JACK

So what do you do?

RACHEL

I'm a lawyer.

JACK (*with sympathy*)

Oh.

RACHEL

Is that it? No lawyer jokes?

JACK

What do you call ten lawyers at the bottom of the ocean?

RACHEL

A good start.

JACK

See? There's no point telling lawyer jokes to a lawyer.