

SCRIPT

# MOTHER AND SON



By Geoffrey Atherden

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# MOTHER AND SON

*By*  
GEOFFREY ATHERDEN



cpress

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David Spicer Productions

PO Box 2280 Rose Bay North, NSW 2030, Australia

Email enquiries to [david@davidspicer.com](mailto:david@davidspicer.com)

[www.davidspicer.com.au/shows/mother-and-son](http://www.davidspicer.com.au/shows/mother-and-son)

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# CONTENTS

Author's Note.....	4
The Stage .....	7
The Characters .....	8
Scene List.....	9
Script: Act 1 .....	10
Script: Act 2 .....	63
Biography: Geoffrey Atherden AM .....	119
David Spicer Productions .....	120

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The idea for *Mother and Son* came from within my family. When my father-in-law died, we realised that my mother-in-law was more than just forgetful. Although she never did come and live with us, I did spend some time wondering what life would have been like if she had.

I noticed something important about my mother-in-law. Even though she was losing in it many ways, she didn't ever lose her sense of humour and she certainly didn't lose her dignity. I also noticed that people around her started to feel sorry for her and began to treat her differently; they treated her as a patient or even as a child, and she hated it. As far as she was concerned, she was the same person she'd always been. She never did feel sorry for herself and that became the beginning of my character.

But although my mother-in-law was the inspiration for the series, she was not the model for Maggie. Maggie began as being much more like my grandmother but as I became more and more aware of Ruth Cracknell's great skills as an actor, she became a completely fictional character.

From the beginning, I wanted to say something positive about older people maintaining a strong sense of themselves, even as they're starting to lose some of their strengths and abilities. At the heart of the series was the question: what do you do when someone you love is driving you up the wall?

The ABC made seven episodes a year and over a ten year period – we missed a couple of years for various reasons – we made six series with a total of forty two episodes. Since then, the series has been seen around the world and fresh productions have been made from the scripts in Chile – *Madré Y Hijo*, Quebec – *Maman Cherie*, the UK – *Keeping Mum*, Sweden – *Glöem Inte*

*Mama*, Denmark – *Pas På Mor*, Turkey – *Yente Anne*, as well as productions in Greece, Lithuania and Serbia. In 2018, a New Daily readers' survey voted *Mother and Son* number 1 in the top 10 most popular television programs of all time.

It was towards the end of 2013 when I was approached by Roger Hodgman, who asked me if I would be interested in writing a *Mother and Son* play. I said I'd think about it because I didn't want to say yes and then find that I'd used up all my ideas in the television series and that I didn't have anything fresh to bring to a new production.

The first thing I realised was how much the world has changed since I started writing *Mother and Son*. Back in the early 1980s there were no mobile phones, no internet, no Skype, no personal alarm systems, none of the bits of technology that we take for granted but which can be confusing for someone who is already confused. More attention has been given to the role of the carers and it's now more possible for the person who does the caring to



get a break through some sort of respite care. Thinking about all this led to the story in this play.

A production was put together very quickly with Noeline Brown to play Maggie and Darren Gilshenan as Arthur. The play ran a successful season at Melbourne's Comedy Theatre in 2014 and then toured to Canberra and Brisbane in 2015. Then in 2022, a fresh production by Jally Entertainment, with Julie McGregor as Maggie and Christopher Truswell as Arthur made a Covid delayed tour down the east coast of Australia.

I've loved all the time I've spent with this family, with Maggie and Arthur and Robert and Liz, more than with any other set of characters I've created. Being invited to spend more time with them is a gift I couldn't refuse.

## THE STAGE

Basically, the set is the family house, more or less as it was for the television series.

I think it will help an audience to settle quickly if the set looks familiar. It doesn't have to be the same as the TV series, but it should be similar in a familiar way.

For this production, the set is the living room.

The living room has a 3 seater sofa and an armchair. Behind the sofa is a drinks trolley. An upright piano has been pushed back into a corner on one side of a large window. A cabinet on the other side contains the good glasses and crockery.

There is a dining table with a number of chairs.

The front door, stage right, opens to a porch. A door extreme stage right leads to a bathroom and Maggie's bedroom.

A door on extreme stage left lead to a laundry and a back door and to Arthur's bedroom.

We won't need to go into the bathroom or any of the bedrooms for this production.

The play will need two other sets, one for Robert's dental surgery and one for the Lounge area of the hostel section of a nursing home.

A projection screen somewhere can be used to screen Skype sessions between Maggie and her two grandchildren, Jarrod (9) and Bronte, (11). These Skype sessions can be used to cover set redressing and wardrobe changes.



## THE CHARACTERS

MAGGIE	The mother, somewhere in her mid to late 70s
ARTHUR	The younger son, 40s
ROBERT	The older son, late 40s
LIZ	Robert's wife mid 40s
ANITA	Arthur's girlfriend, late 30s or early 40s
MONICA	Nursing home or hostel resident 70s
STEVE	Aged Care Assessor, 40ish

*Two children are used in pre-recorded video segments*

BRONTE	Robert and Liz's daughter - 11
JARROD	Robert and Liz's son – 9

*One actor used for voice only*

MALE VOICE	The voice on the personal alarm system – Mumbai call centre
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## OTHER VOICES FOR PHONE MESSAGES

## SCENE LIST

### ACT 1

1. SCENE ONE - LIVING ROOM
2. PHONE CALL ONE
3. SCENE TWO - LIVING ROOM
4. PHONE CALL TWO
5. SCENE THREE - ROBERT'S SURGERY
6. PHONE CALL THREE
7. SCENE FOUR - LIVING ROOM
8. PROJECTION ONE
9. SCENE FIVE - LIVING ROOM
10. PROJECTION TWO
11. SCENE SIX - LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN

### ACT 2

1. SCENE ONE - LIVING ROOM
2. PROJECTION THREE
3. SCENE TWO - LIVING ROOM
4. PHONE CALL FOUR
5. SCENE THREE - LIVING ROOM
6. PROJECTION FOUR
7. SCENE FOUR - LIVING ROOM
8. PHONE CALL FIVE
9. SCENE FIVE - RESIDENT'S LOUNGE - HOSTEL
10. PHONE CALL SIX
11. SCENE SIX - LIVING ROOM
12. PHONE CALL SEVEN
13. SCENE SEVEN - LIVING ROOM

## ACT 1

## SCENE ONE

*[Living Room. Night. The house is in darkness. MAGGIE enters from her bedroom with a torch. She's wearing a dressing gown over a nightie. MAGGIE crosses to the centre of the living room, switches on the torch and shines it up to the ceiling, aiming it at a hanging light fitting. Something isn't right. Using the light of the torch, MAGGIE crosses to the laundry, opens the door and exits. Offstage sounds of a struggle to get something which involves moving things out of the way which clatter. MAGGIE enters, struggling with a ladder. MAGGIE pulls the ladder to the centre of the living room and opens it out. MAGGIE checks that the ladder is steady then climbs up two rungs and reaches up with one hand towards the light fitting. Not high enough. MAGGIE climbs up another rung, straightens with some nervousness, and reaches up. Still not high enough. MAGGIE climbs up one more rung and starts to stand up straight, wobbling, worried by not having anything to hold on to. A key in the door and ARTHUR opens. ARTHUR sees MAGGIE immediately.]*

ARTHUR: What are you doing?

MAGGIE: Changing the light bulb.

*[ARTHUR switches on the light.]*

ARTHUR: Why?

*[MAGGIE is surprised that the light works.]*

ARTHUR: I changed it before I went out

*[ARTHUR closes the door and enters].*

ARTHUR: I told you. I said, I'm going out now but I've changed the light bulb.

*[MAGGIE doesn't remember. ARTHUR crosses to her.]*

ARTHUR: Come on. Down you come, you'll have another fall.

You can't go climbing ladders at your age.

MAGGIE: I might have to, if I'm left all on my own and a light bulb wants changing.

ARTHUR: It didn't need changing. You'd have realised that if you just turned it on at the switch.

MAGGIE: The last time I did that, it went fzzz bzzz bzzz.

ARTHUR: And I fixed it. If you didn't want to turn that light on, you could've turned this light on. Or this light on.

*[ARTHUR crosses to switch on a standard lamp in one part of the room and a table lamp in another.]*

MAGGIE: I don't want the whole house lit up like a fairy ground, not at this time of night. Do you know what time it is?

ARTHUR: I left you a note.

MAGGIE: Which I couldn't see in the dark

ARTHUR: Here, it says...

MAGGIE: I've been worried sick.

ARTHUR: ...“Mum, I've gone out with a friend. Home after midnight.”

MAGGIE: I was going to call the police.

ARTHUR: Oh for heaven's sake.

MAGGIE: And I would have, if I'd been able to find the phone.

ARTHUR: Where is it?

MAGGIE: Somewhere you put it. I told you, I don't like this new fangled phone that you carry all over the place. I liked the old phone where you always knew where it was.

*[ARTHUR has taken out his mobile and dials a number.]*

MAGGIE: You go out, you leave me on my own with no phone.

Who knows what might happen? The house might catch on fire and I might need to ring the emergency whatsaname but too

bad about that because someone doesn't put the phone back where...

*[The telephone starts ringing inside the pocket of her dressing gown. She realises what has happened and then decides to ignore it.]*

ARTHUR: Aren't you going to answer it?

MAGGIE: Who'd be ringing me at this time of night?

*[ARTHUR hangs up the mobile as MAGGIE takes the phone out her pocket and answers it.]*

MAGGIE: Hello? Hello! No one there. Just a nuisance call.

*[As MAGGIE start to return the phone to her pocket.]*

ARTHUR: Don't put it back in there. Put it on the base where it belongs.

*[MAGGIE does, begrudgingly]*

ARTHUR: You have to put it back there to recharge the battery.

MAGGIE: I don't like this phone. The old phone didn't have batteries, it just worked.

*[The phone chirps as it is placed on its base.]*

MAGGIE: And it didn't make noises like that.

*[The front doorbell rings. MAGGIE picks up the phone again.]*

MAGGIE: Hello?

ARTHUR: It's not the phone, it's the front door.

MAGGIE: Visitors? At this time of night?

*[ARTHUR crosses to the front door.]*

MAGGIE: Are you expecting anyone?

ARTHUR: No.

MAGGIE: Am I?

ARTHUR: Who knows?

*[ARTHUR opens the door to ROBERT, coat over his shoulder, tie undone.]*

ROBERT: Giddy, Artie. Can I come in?

*[ARTHUR stands back and ROBERT enters. ROBERT seems quiet, subdued, distracted.]*

MAGGIE: Robbie, what a lovely surprise.

ROBERT: Hello, Mum. I was just going past. I saw all the lights on so I knew you'd be up.

ARTHUR: What are you doing here?

MAGGIE: He's come to see his Mummy Beare. Like a good boy should.

ARTHUR: At one o'clock in the morning?

MAGGIE: I don't mind what time it is. He can come and see me any time he likes.

ARTHUR: What's going on?

ROBERT: Nothing. What's the ladder for?

MAGGIE: Ask him. He makes me do things.

ROBERT: On a ladder?

MAGGIE: Change light bulbs.

ROBERT: *[To ARTHUR]* Are you crazy?

ARTHUR: No. I changed the light bulb before I went out. She forgot.

*[There's the chime of a text message coming in to a mobile phone. Both ARTHUR and ROBERT react, fishing out their phones. MAGGIE also reacts, reaching around for the house phone.]*

MAGGIE: Hello?

ARTHUR: It's OK, Mum, it's just a text message coming in.

*[ROBERT realises it's not him.]*

ARTHUR: From a friend of mine.

*[ARTHUR looks at it, reads quickly, is amused and starts tapping a reply.]*

MAGGIE: Who'd be sending a message at this time of night?

ARTHUR: A friend of mine. Just a sec.

*[ARTHUR is in a good mood as he taps his reply.]*

ROBERT: *[As he sits down]* Someone should put this ladder away.

MAGGIE: Thank you, Robbie. At least someone pays attention to me.

*[ARTHUR finishes his text message.]*

ARTHUR: Actually, I'm glad you're here Robert. I've got some news. In a couple of weeks, I'm going away on a holiday.

MAGGIE: Are we? Where are we going?

ARTHUR: No, I said I. I'm going away.

MAGGIE: There's no need for you to go on your own, surely.

ARTHUR: I'm not. I'm going with a friend of mine.

ROBERT: Man or woman?

ARTHUR: Woman.

MAGGIE: What woman?

ARTHUR: Someone I've met recently.

MAGGIE: Do I know her?

ARTHUR: Not yet. But you will.

MAGGIE: I'll get dressed.

*[MAGGIE heads for her bedroom.]*

ARTHUR: Wait wait, Mum, she's not coming now.

MAGGIE: Funny time of day for visitors, but you young people seem to do things at any tickery dock.

ARTHUR: She's not coming now!

MAGGIE: Now she's not coming! Next time, I only hope you give me a bit of notice. I don't want to meet her in my nightie.

*[ARTHUR'S phone chimes with another text message. He looks at it and smiles.]*

MAGGIE: Not another one!

ARTHUR: It's my friend. She's saying good night.

*[ARTHUR turns to ROBERT.]*

ARTHUR: I hope you're listening. When I go away, I want you to look after Mum.

ROBERT: Sure.

ARTHUR: I mean it.

ROBERT: Don't worry about it.

ARTHUR: I'll be away for three weeks.

ROBERT: Sure. You'll be all right, won't you, Mum.

MAGGIE: I'm always all right.

ARTHUR: No, she isn't. She climbs up ladders in the middle of the night. She can't be left on her own.

ROBERT: Don't worry about it.

*[ROBERT'S mobile phone rings. It has a pretentious ring tone, something like the start of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. MAGGIE reacts.]*

MAGGIE: What, what?

ROBERT: It's OK, Mum, it's me.

*[ROBERT takes out his phone, recognises the caller and swipes to answer, walking away from MAGGIE and ARTHUR.]*

ROBERT: Hello, darling. – At Mum's. – No, no, nothing like that. No, it's like I told you, I got a call from Artie, same old same old, the usual emergency which turns out to be... although, no, this time there was a problem. Mum was halfway up a ladder. – I know.

*[ROBERT continues the call quietly, as far from Maggie and Arthur as he can.]*

MAGGIE: Who's Robbie talking to?

ARTHUR: Liz.

MAGGIE: She's not coming here?

ARTHUR: No, I don't think so.



MAGGIE: Just as well. The last thing I need is another lecture from Liz.

ROBERT: Anyway, everything's alright here now, so I'll be home in... Why? – Liz, Liz, let me come home and explain. The only phone I've got is the one you're ringing me on. – If I just...

*[LIZ has hung up on him.]*

ROBERT: ...Bye, darling. Love you.

*[ROBERT hangs up, sheepish.]*

ROBERT: Listen, it's a bit late for me to go waking up Liz... and she's got a terrible migraine so...

ARTHUR: You're not going to tell me what's going on, are you.

ROBERT: I just thought I might stay here.

ARTHUR: None of my business. Right. I'll make up the couch.

ROBERT: The couch?

ARTHUR: I assume you don't want to sleep with me. Or Mum.

ROBERT: No, but listen, have you heard of Dentist's Back?

ARTHUR: I thought you guys sat down these days.

ROBERT: We do. But it's still a problem and the slightest thing can set it off, like sleeping on something like that, and if you're going away and you want me to be fit and well and able to look after Mum.

*[ARTHUR knows he's been tricked into this.]*

ARTHUR: OK, OK, I'll sleep on the couch.

ROBERT: Thanks, Artie.

*[MAGGIE gathers her two boys together.]*

MAGGIE: Ah, that's what I like to see. My two boys, getting on so well together.

## PHONE CALL ONE

*[In the dark, ARTHUR'S phone rings. He answers it offstage, surprised at the lateness of the call. During the call, we may hear intermittent sounds from LIZ'S end – drawers being opened and shut, cupboard doors being banged.]*

ARTHUR: Hello?

LIZ: *[Voice]* Arthur?

ARTHUR: Yes.

LIZ: Is Robert there with you?

ARTHUR: Not at the moment.

LIZ: I knew it.

ARTHUR: Liz, I'm in the bathroom.

LIZ: Oh. But he is there in the house?

ARTHUR: Yes.

LIZ: Doing what?

ARTHUR: I don't know, probably he's sleeping which is a lot better than I'm doing.

LIZ: Oh, God, sorry, did I wake you up?

ARTHUR: No, I'm in the bathroom looking for something for my headache because Robert is in my bed in my room and I'm trying to sleep on the couch and I've put my neck out.

LIZ: Oh, God, Arthur, why do you let him do that? Why do you let people...? *[She pauses.]* Now I'm doing it, ringing you in the middle of the night. I'm sorry. I'll go.

ARTHUR: Liz, are you alright? What's all that banging?

LIZ: Nothing. Just looking for something. Don't worry. Bye.

*[LIZ hangs up.]*

## SCENE TWO

*[Living room. The next day. ARTHUR is dressed for another day, folding up the bedding on the couch. MAGGIE is at the table drinking tea, reading from a local newspaper.]*

MAGGIE: Listen to this. “Head Librarian, Magda Blakovsky says, ‘I’m looking forward to inviting some of our senior citizens in to read to children in our after school reading group.’”

*[ARTHUR is only half paying attention.]*

MAGGIE: What do you think?

ARTHUR: Sounds like a good idea.

MAGGIE: I’m going to volunteer.

ARTHUR: Ah, no, hang on...

MAGGIE: I’ll go today.

ARTHUR: I don’t think this is for people like you.

MAGGIE: What’s wrong with people like me?

ARTHUR: You don’t think maybe you’re a bit...old?

MAGGIE: No.

ARTHUR: They might think so.

MAGGIE: If they say that, I’ll charge them with age disintegration.

ARTHUR: It’s certainly that.

MAGGIE: Don’t you think I can do it?

ARTHUR: I think it’s a wonderful idea and it’s lovely of you to think of doing it, however...

*[ARTHUR’S bedroom door opens and ROBERT enters, bringing his jacket and tie.]*

ROBERT: Morning.

MAGGIE: Robbie, what brings you here?

ROBERT: I was here all night, Mum, I slept here.

MAGGIE: *[To ARTHUR]* Do you know about this?

ARTHUR: *[Pressing his sore neck]* Ah yes.

ROBERT: What's for breakfast?

MAGGIE: What would you like? Would you like your favourite?

ROBERT: Not sure I remember what my favourite is, but sure, thanks, Mum.

MAGGIE: Arthur, make your brother his favourite breakfast.

*[MAGGIE returns to the newspaper as ARTHUR crosses into the kitchen.]*

ARTHUR: *[To ROBERT]* I'll put the kettle on. The rest is up to you.

ROBERT: A bit of toast'd be good.

ARTHUR: OK, and then the rest is up to you.

*[ARTHUR exits to the kitchen where we hear him put the kettle on and drop a slice of bread into the toaster while MAGGIE reads to ROBERT.]*

MAGGIE: Listen to this. "Head Librarian, Magda Blakovsky says, 'I'm looking forward to inviting some of our senior citizens in to read to children in our after school reading group.'" I'm going to do it.

ROBERT: That's a great idea.

ARTHUR: Let's not get too carried away, Robert, you're not the one who's going to have to get her there and get her back and...

ROBERT: Moan moan moan. You must get sick of this, Mum.

MAGGIE: I do, Robbie, sick to the back teeth.

*[ARTHUR is about to protest, but ROBERT beats him to it.]*

ROBERT: You are living on easy street. Your life is like a canapé. I'm the meat in the sandwich.

ARTHUR: Would that be the ham or the baloney?

ROBERT: I'm caught in the middle with responsibilities to my children, my wife, my mother, my patients, my practice, the community at large. All you've got is Mum.

MAGGIE: Anyone would think I was some sort of problem.

*[The doorbell rings. MAGGIE is near the phone and picks it up.]*

MAGGIE: Hello?

ARTHUR: It's the front door.

*[ARTHUR crosses quickly to the door. MAGGIE puts the phone back.]*

MAGGIE: Visitors!

*[ARTHUR opens the door to LIZ, dressed for her morning Zumba class, a big hold-all bag over her shoulder.]*

LIZ: Is Robert still here?

ARTHUR: *[Standing back]* Yes.

LIZ: *[Entering]* Thank you.

ARTHUR: *[To himself]* Good morning, Liz, nice to see you.

*[But LIZ is there on a mission. She sees ROBERT and crosses purposefully towards him, one hand out holding a bunch of keys.]*

ROBERT: Liz, darling...

LIZ: Keys.

*[ROBERT doesn't know what she means. MAGGIE watches, also confused. ROBERT puts a hand out to take LIZ'S keys.]*

LIZ: Your keys. We're swapping cars.

ROBERT: Why?

LIZ: You're taking the kids. They're outside in my car. I'm going to my Zumba class in your car.

MAGGIE: Did you say the children are outside, Liz?

LIZ: Yes, Mum, I know you'd love to see them but there isn't time.

MAGGIE: What time do they start school?

LIZ: This is pre-school, Mum. Jarrod goes to fencing and Bronte does oboe. You know that.

MAGGIE: And you've got your zombie class.

LIZ: Zumba.

MAGGIE: I'll just say a quick hello.

LIZ: There isn't time, I'm sorry. Robert is leaving, aren't you, Robert.

ROBERT: Liz, darling...

LIZ: Don't. Keys.

ROBERT: As much as I'd like to help...

*[LIZ is quick to take out a mobile phone and speed dials a number.]*

ROBERT: ...but on the other hand, if you can find someone else to take them.

*[After a moment a mobile phone rings loud – it's The Gypsy Kings chorus of 'Bamboleo'. ROBERT starts to feel his pockets and look around.]*

LIZ: Got you.

*[LIZ takes a second mobile out of her bag and turns off the ring tone.]*

MAGGIE: What on earth is that?

LIZ: Robert's second mobile phone.

ROBERT: It's not mine.

MAGGIE: Another mobile whatsaname?

LIZ: Some people have more than one.

ROBERT: I don't.

MAGGIE: I haven't even got one.

LIZ: You do, Mum, you just don't use yours. I know it's tempting for old people to drop out and wish the world wasn't changing,

but it is and you really should try to keep up with all this new technology. My mother does.

ROBERT: Liz, that phone...whose is it?

LIZ: We can either discuss this here in front of everyone, or we could talk about it later and you can take my car and drive the children.

ROBERT: Good idea.

*[ROBERT hands over his keys and takes LIZ'S keys.]*

ROBERT: Not that I'm avoiding anything. There's a very simple explanation for all this.

LIZ: And I'll give you all day to think of one.

ROBERT: Alright, Liz, I'm on my way. Bye, darling. Bye again, Mum.

*[ROBERT tries a peck on the cheek. LIZ dodges. ROBERT exits. LIZ picks up her bag and is about to leave. ARTHUR joins her. From the kitchen, the sound of toast popping out of the toaster.]*

MAGGIE: Who wanted the toast?

*[No one pays any attention.]*

ARTHUR: I'm glad you're here, Liz.

*[LIZ guesses something is coming.]*

LIZ: Yes, quickly.

ARTHUR: In a couple of weeks, I'm going away.

LIZ: And...?

ARTHUR: For three weeks.

LIZ: And...?

ARTHUR: Aren't you going to ask who with?

LIZ: Alright, who with?

MAGGIE: With whom?

ARTHUR: A friend of mine.

LIZ: Man or woman?

ARTHUR: A woman.

LIZ: Ah, that sort of going away.

MAGGIE: What sort of going away?

LIZ: Good on you. Good on you, Arthur. It's about time you did something for yourself. I often think what a miserable life you have.

ARTHUR: It's not that bad.

LIZ: I said to Robert when your father died...

ARTHUR: I know. *[he's heard it before]*

LIZ: *[continuous]* ...if Arthur and Deidre move in with your mother...

MAGGIE: Deidre?

LIZ: ...it'll be a disaster...

MAGGIE: Dreadful woman.

LIZ: ...and I was right...

MAGGIE: Just walked out on him.

LIZ: ...not that I blame her, but ever since you've been such a sad little dogsbody.

ARTHUR: Well this little dogsbody is going away.

LIZ: But will you?

ARTHUR: Yes I will, but someone is going to have to look after Mum.

LIZ: There you go, making excuses.

ARTHUR: She can't be left here on her own.

LIZ: For heaven's sake, Arthur, no excuses, just go.

ARTHUR: I thought she could go and stay with you.

LIZ: I wish, I'm sorry, no, look, as you know, I'm very fond of your mother, it just won't, oh God, at the moment, you have no idea...

*[LIZ makes a decision.]*

LIZ: Come over here.



MAGGIE: Where are you going?

ARTHUR: Not far.

*[LIZ takes ARTHUR'S arm and leads him well away from MAGGIE.]*

MAGGIE: You're not going away with Liz?

ARTHUR: No, we're just having a private conversation.

MAGGIE: Oh, a private conversation. All right, you have your private conversation over there, I'll have my own private conversation, over here, on my own.

*[MAGGIE exits to the kitchen and re-enters with the toast which she takes to a plate on the table. MAGGIE butters the toast. LIZ shows ROBERT'S second phone to ARTHUR.]*

LIZ: Look at this. Recognise her?

ARTHUR: No. I mean, there's no face, it's just the um...(breasts).

LIZ: What about this one? Without the bra?

ARTHUR: Doesn't help.

LIZ: I know who it is. Sharron, Robert's hygienist.

ARTHUR: I've never seen her like that.

LIZ: And look at this one Robert sent to her.

*[ARTHUR looks then looks away quickly.]*

ARTHUR: I don't want to see that.

LIZ: It's Robert.

ARTHUR: I've never seen that part of Robert.

LIZ: It's him alright.

ARTHUR: And certainly not like that.

LIZ: Not that I've seen him like this for some time...

*[MAGGIE approaches. She's been left out of it for too long. She brings the toast.]*

MAGGIE: What are we looking at?

LIZ: Nothing.

*[LIZ shuts the phone down and puts it away.]*

MAGGIE: Photos?

ARTHUR/LIZ: No.

LIZ: Just some silly nonsense, Mum.

*[MAGGIE knows she's being excluded and walks away.]*

LIZ: *[To ARTHUR]* Do you realise you're the only person in the world I can show this to? I haven't got a single friend I can really trust.

*[ARTHUR gives her a sympathetic pat. LIZ collects her bag.]*

LIZ: Bye, Arthur. You're not going to take that holiday are you. What a shame. Bye Mum.

*[ARTHUR follows LIZ to the door where they pause.]*

LIZ: *[Confidentially]* Arthur, about your mother, you do understand, don't you. I want my children to have a positive image of the elderly, and your mother just isn't.

*[LIZ gives ARTHUR a kiss on the cheek and exits.]*

*ARTHUR crosses to the sofa to pick up the bedding to take it to the laundry. MAGGIE approaches, bringing the local newspaper.]*

MAGGIE: Listen to this. "Head Librarian, Magda Blakovsky says...

ARTHUR: Mum, stop. You're not going to read to the library to read to children. You can't.

MAGGIE: Oh yes I can.

ARTHUR: No, you can't because they time when they need people is when I'll be away on my holiday, and you'll be staying with Robert and Liz.

MAGGIE: I wish someone would take me on a holiday. Do you remember that time we went to that beach house? There was a jetty. And we walked down the jetty and we sat and dangled our feet in the water and a...

MAGGIE/ARTHUR: ...dolphin

MAGGIE: ...came right up...

MAGGIE/ARTHUR: ...and swam around our feet / your feet.

MAGGIE: You do remember.

ARTHUR: I wasn't there.

MAGGIE: Yes you were.

ARTHUR: It was Dad you were with, not me.

MAGGIE: Where were you?

ARTHUR: I wasn't born.

MAGGIE: If you weren't there, Mister Smarty, how do you  
remember what happened?

ARTHUR: Because I've heard you tell this story before.

MAGGIE: Have I?

ARTHUR: Only a few thousand times.

*[ARTHUR heads for the laundry.]*

MAGGIE: What about this toast?

ARTHUR: I don't want it.

MAGGIE: Why did you ask for it?

ARTHUR: I didn't.

MAGGIE: What a waste.

## PHONE CALL TWO

*[The sound of a phone call going through to an answering machine.]*

ARTHUR: *[Voice]* This is the phone for Maggie Beare and Arthur Beare. Please leave a message after the tone. *[Beep.]*

PENNY: Hello, Mrs Beare, this is Penny from the corner shop.

First of all, let me say how sorry I am that there was that little misunderstanding with my husband. And my husband wants you to know he's very sorry about what happened. He's been under a lot of stress lately, a lot of trouble with his prostate but... Anyway, I know my husband and I know he didn't mean it when he called you a demented old fool. I know that a lot of our seniors are still confused about paying with a tap credit card and I'm sure my husband was only trying to show you how to use it, and definitely not trying to steal it from you, definitely not... Anyway, the reason for my call is that somehow in all that silly fuss, we've lost our credit card machine and I know there was a bit of a tussle, ha ha, and I wonder if somehow the little machine might have fallen into your shopping bag. Look, anyway, if it has, if you have a look and find it there, would you mind bringing it back to us and I'll make sure my husband apologises to you in person... Once again, very sorry. Bye.

## SCENE THREE

*[ROBERT'S surgery. ROBERT is very proud of his surgery. It's where all the expensive doctors and dentists are. ROBERT, wearing his dentist's tunic sits, on the surgery chair; looking agitated. Soothing music plays, but it isn't working. ARTHUR knocks. As soon as he hears the door open, ROBERT sits upright without turning around.]*

ROBERT: I said no interruptions.

ARTHUR: *[Entering]* It's me.

ROBERT: What are you doing here?

ARTHUR: Your receptionist says you've cancelled all your patients.

*[ROBERT considers telling ARTHUR to piss off but changes his mind.]*

ROBERT: I'm in trouble.

ARTHUR: I know.

ROBERT: You don't. I'm being blackmailed. I had a patient, he wanted crowns, a lot of crowns. I told him, I said, clearly, your roots are not secure. If I put crowns on your teeth, they're likely to fall out. He insisted, and against my own advice, I was stupid, I gave him the crowns. I was right. They all fell out. Now he blames me and he's making trouble. He must've come in here while I was meditating. I can only assume he drugged me, stripped me naked, took photos. Did the same to Sharron, my hygienist. Put those photos on a phone and put it into a pocket in my jacket which I didn't know about until Liz must've found it last night. That's what I'll tell Liz when I get home.

*[ROBERT waits for ARTHUR'S reaction.]*

ROBERT: *[With sudden despair]* You're right. She'll never believe it.

ARTHUR: Tell her the truth.

ROBERT: She'll kill me.

ARTHUR: Tell her it was all a big mistake...

ROBERT: She'll kill me.

ARTHUR: ...and it'll never happen again.

ROBERT: Aren't you listening to me? Liz is going to kill me.

ARTHUR: She'll kill you if you tell her that ridiculous story about being drugged.

ROBERT: I don't know what to do.

ARTHUR: You have to tell Liz that things are over and done with Sharron

ROBERT: Sack Sharron?

ARTHUR: You have to do something big.

ROBERT: Sack Sharron?

ARTHUR: You can't go on having an affair with Sharron and stay married to Liz.

ROBERT: I'm not having an affair. We don't go out together. We don't have romantic dinners. We don't see each other outside the surgery. We just have sex. Here. That's all.

*[ARTHUR takes out his mobile and starts tapping into Google.]*

ARTHUR: Shall I Google the definition of an affair.

ROBERT: I can tell by the look on your face, you think I'm doing something wrong.

ARTHUR: You are doing something wrong.

ROBERT: No, see, you haven't enjoyed the benefit of a long and successful marriage.

ARTHUR: Don't tell me you're doing this to help your marriage?

ROBERT: Liz is very busy, she gets terrible migraines...

ARTHUR: And you have terrible needs.

ROBERT: When you say it like that, you make it sound grubby, and it's not. It's...spiritual.

ARTHUR: Robert, it has to stop.

ROBERT: OK, OK, but I can't sack Sharron. She's got enough evidence on her phone to blackmail me for everything I've got.

ARTHUR: Spiritual photos, obviously. Robert, how you do this is your problem, but she can't go on working here.

ROBERT: No. No, you're right. She can't. You're absolutely right. Thanks, Artie. If I can ever return the favour.

ARTHUR: As a matter of fact, you can.

ROBERT: Sure.

ARTHUR: When I go away, I want you to look after Mum.

ROBERT: You need help.

ARTHUR: That's what I'm saying.

ROBERT: No, not with Mum. Mum's fine. You need help with your problem.

ARTHUR: My problem?

ROBERT: Low self esteem. You convince yourself that Mum can't do without you and that means that at least someone needs you. See, psychologically, what you're doing is trying to be Dad. Would you like me to refer you to someone?

ARTHUR: Or, I could just ring Liz and tell her about our conversation.

ROBERT: I'll look after Mum. I said I would. But, I'll look after Mum my way. OK?

ARTHUR: If I come back and anything has happened to her...

ROBERT: Do I tell you how to look after Mum?

ARTHUR: Yes.

ROBERT: Well don't tell me.

ARTHUR: What?

ROBERT: You go away, have your holiday, and when you come back, Mum'll be here, waiting for you, just the same as before you went away.

ARTHUR: You make it sound like something to look forward to.

ROBERT: Where are you going by the way?

ARTHUR: Broome.

ROBERT: Well there you are. If anything happens, you're only a phone call away. Or a text message. You could be back in half a day.

ARTHUR: No, the idea is that if anything happens...

ROBERT: Yes yes yes.

ARTHUR: ...you look after it.

ROBERT: Yes! Just kidding, go on, go away.

*[ROBERT closes the door on ARTHUR. ROBERT seems thoughtful for a moment, then makes a decision and picks up the internal phone.]*

ROBERT: Lucy, is Sharron in surgery today? – With a patient? – As soon as she's finished, could you ask her to come in to see me?

*[ROBERT hangs up.]*