

“LOOKING AFTER NORMAN”

by

Stewart Brown

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Cast:

Georgia: (8).

Mrs Scott: (82).

Mum: (32). Wife of Dad and mother of Georgia.

Dad: (35) Ralph. Salesman. Hard-working. Needs a holiday. Hobby is fishing. Hates cats.

Norman: Cat. Represented by mime (*and follow spot, if desired*).

Mr Jones: Social worker.

Avocado: Georgia's teddy bear and the narrator.

(The degree to which he is made up to represent a teddy bear is discretionary).

Props:

5 Chairs.

Tartan travel rug.

Cat basket.

Cat bowl.

Can be improvised:

Settee/chairs in a row.

Caravan seating/2 pairs of chairs at right angles.

Car/2 pairs of chairs one behind the other.

Can be mimed:

Phone and phone table.

Hearing aid.

Carrier bag with cans.

Coat (Dad's) and coat-stand or hook.

Yellow Pages.

Drinks: 2 glasses, bottle of "sherry."

Jigsaw.

Fishing rod.

Teapot and cup(s).

(The set, representative of a living-room, is not yet fully lit. The main door is free standing and serves as the front doors of all locations. Other doors lead off the living-room. CS are 3 of the chairs set out in a row to represent a settee. Over the back of the 'settee' is a tartan travel rug. Enter AVOCADO. Has fixed smile and walks very stiff legged with arms held out in front of him. Walks to a chair DS right which is spot-lit. This chair is the narrator's main position. Sits facing audience with legs out in front of him. Looks out at audience.)

AVOCADO: Hi. *(If no reply.)* Hi! *(Pause.)* Come on, admit it. You're thinking, "What a fantabulously cute teddy bear". Right? Yeah, you're thinking, 'Whose teddy bear is he?' Well, the answer is Georgia Brown's. You'll meet Georgia. Before too long she'll come skipping in here and squash me. She always does. She also tells me everything. Even things she won't tell her Mum and Dad. *(Pause.)* Especially things she won't tell her Mum and Dad! That's why I'm the teller of this story. I know *everything*. I can put you in the *whole* picture. OK? OK.

SINGS:

*Trust an old teddy
To always be ready
To share all your dreams, hopes and fears;
You can weep like a willow
He'll sit on your pillow
And never once laugh at your tears.*

*Trust an old teddy
A friend true and steady
When people can't help you at all;
If you're in a muddle
Just give him a cuddle
You'll soon see your troubles are small.*

*Trust an old teddy
Whatever you've said he...
... will guard till the grass all turns blue!
Then he'll make it a story
In all of its glory
And tell it to — (er) only a few...*

*Yes, he'll make it a story
In all of its glory
With funny bits, sad bits
Exciting — not borey
Bums on seats and get ready
And trust an old teddy
To tell it... to rascals... like YOU!*

Let's meet Mum and Dad.

(Lighting comes up on main set.)

Dad's a salesman.

(Enter DAD and drops onto settee and yawns.)

Works hard...

DAD: Gosh, I'm tired...

AVOCADO: ...Needs a holiday...

DAD: I really could do with a break...

AVOCADO: ...can't stand cats! *(Cat sound off.)*

DAD: *(In fury).* Oh, no! Not that blasted cat again! *(Jumps up and rushes to the window. Shouts.)* Clear off! Go on, just clear off! *(Exits to chase cat shaking fist.)*

AVOCADO: Mum is a - well, a mum. Works really hard...*(Enter MUM with duster. Dusts settee.)*

MUM: Phew! Where *does* all the dust come from?

AVOCADO: Loves tea...

MUM: Think I'll make myself a nice cup of tea...*(Exits.)*

AVOCADO: ...Likes everybody to be happy. And *nobody* was happy that weekend. The weekend of Norman. It all began last Friday when Georgia came in from school.

(Enter GEORGIA.)

GEORGIA: Oh, there you are, Avocado!

AVOCADO: *(Aside, a little smugly).* Oh, forgot to tell you. As well as being fantabulously cute, I also have a *fantabulously* cute name.

GEORGIA: *(Squashing AVOCADO).* Avocado, you'll never guess. You know my friend, Scottie. You *know*, Mrs Scott, the old lady at number twelve who makes me laugh and likes telling me the same stories over and over again? Well, she may have to go into prison. *(Pauses thoughtfully then takes a deep breath.)* Listen, Avvie, maybe I should tell it from the beginning. *(Pause.)* I was on my way home from school and I decided to visit Scottie...

(MUSICAL LINK: in a skipping rhythm .GEORGIA skips US to outside of door and rings bell. No response. Rings again. Shrugs and begins to walk away. Stops. There's a sound. Listens intently.)

MRS SCOTT: *(Very faint).* Georgia. Georgia...is that you?

GEORGIA: *(Calling).* Scottie! *(Tries front door. It opens.)* Scottie. It's me — Georgia.

MRS SCOTT: In here, dearie.

(GEORGIA enters living-room looking round in bewilderment.)

MRS SCOTT: Here. Over here behind the sofa.

(GEORGIA crosses to the sofa as lighting picks up MRS SCOTT sitting on the floor behind the sofa in an awkward position.)

GEORGIA: Hi, Scottie. *(Surprised).* Why are you sitting on the floor? You look so... uncomfy.

MRS SCOTT: *(Laughing).* I *am* uncomfy. I really am. What else am I, eh? Come on, Georgie, I'm a...

GEORGIA/MRS SCOTT: *(Together.)...silly old fruit bat!*

(MRS SCOTT laughs helplessly, then as she recovers, she rubs her leg and winces. GEORGIA kneels down beside her.)

GEORGIA: *(Anxiously).* Scottie. Have you hurt yourself?

MRS SCOTT: Oh, no. Not *really* hurt. I think...I think I must have had one of my, my dizzy turns. *(Pause.)* One of my...

GEORGIA/MRS SCOTT:*(together).* ...*little helicopter whirls.*

MRS SCOTT: Exactly! Only this one wasn't so little. One minute I was going to have some fizzy orange, the next I was lying staring under the sideboard. Mind you, I found that pair of old specs I told you I'd lost. Yes, there they were, under the sideboard, sort of *staring* back at me. *(Holds up glasses.)* They're fine. A bit... *(Blows on glasses and a cloud of dust flies. Coughs.)*...a bit dusty, but fine. *(Puts on glasses.)*

GEORGIA: How long have been lying on the floor, then?

MRS SCOTT: Let's see, now. I was listening to the radio...

GEORGIA: On your hearing aid?

MRS SCOTT: Yes. Picking up nice as you please, it was. Just as well it's good for something, eh? *(Pause.)* Anyway, then I listened to the news...

GEORGIA: Which news?

MRS SCOTT: One o'clock.

GEORGIA: *(Considering, then horrified).* One o'clock! But that's *hours* ago! Can I help you up?

MRS SCOTT: No, I don't think I should move, dearie, but you *can* fetch me that travel rug. *(Points.)* Yes, on the settee. *(GEORGIA fetches the tartan rug and helps MRS SCOTT wrap it round herself.)* Lovely! Now the phone table. *(GEORGIA goes quickly.)* Open the drawer. *(Opens drawer.)* That's a lass! There's a wee card in there. *(GEORGIA holds up card.)* Champion! Now dial that number and ask for Mr Jones. Tell him——

GEORGIA: *(Interrupting aghast).* Mr Jones? He's the one who wants you to go to *prison*!

MRS SCOTT: The very one, dearie. Just tell him what's happened, like a lass.

(GEORGIA dials slowly and deliberately, reading out the numbers as she does so.)

GEORGIA: Five...two...five. *(Pause.)* Seven...seven eight two. *(Pause. Then nervously.)* Hel...*(Pause, listening.)* Hello. Mr Jones, plea...*(Pause.)* Can I speak to...yes, Mr Jones? *(GEORGIA covers phone and turns to MRS SCOTT.)* The lady's gone to fetch Mr Jones.

MRS SCOTT: Well, done, Georgie! Well done!

GEORGIA: I can hear them typing and...*(To phone.)* Yes...*(Pause, listening.)* Yes, Scottie's had an accident. *(Pause.)* Yes. Yes. *(Pause.)* Yes, Mrs Scott. *(Pause.)* Georgia Brown. Yes. Her friend. She...yes, she had one of her helicop...eh, she felt dizzy and fell dow...*(Pause.)* Behind the settee. *(Long pause.)* I fetched her rug and wrapped it round...Yes. *(Pause.)* All right. Yes. *(Pause.)* Bye. *(To MRS SCOTT.)* He said he'll be here right away.

MRS SCOTT: *(Pats floor beside her and holds open the rug).* Come on, Georgie...cosy in.

(GEORGIA goes and sits beside MRS SCOTT.)

MRS SCOTT: *(Points to her hearing aid).* Will we listen to the radio?

GEORGIA: *(Thoughtfully).* Scottie. Why can you always hear me when I speak to you, but not people like Mr Jones when he comes to see you?

SCOTTIE: Ah! Well, you see, Georgie, when you get very old like me, you only hear what you *want* to hear.

GEORGIA: (*Puzzled*). I don't understand.

MRS SCOTT: Well, if I don't like what someone's saying I——

GEORGIA: (*Excited by her sudden understanding*). Oh, I know! You *pretend* you don't hear.

MRS SCOTT: Exactly! Now isn't that silly?

GEORGIA: Not really. I do that too sometimes. Like when Mum says it's time for bed. (*Pause*). So there's nothing *really* wrong with your hearing aid?

MRS SCOTT: (*Giggling*). Not when it's switched on.

GEORGIA: (*Giggling*). Do you switch it off when Mr Jones comes?

MRS SCOTT: Sometimes.

GEORGIA: Because he keeps wanting you to go into prison?

MRS SCOTT: Well, Georgie, it's *really* a place called *residential care*.

GEORGIA: But you call it prison, don't you?

MRS SCOTT: Yes, but that's another thing you do when you get very old. You say silly things sometimes.

GEORGIA: So, residen...(*Pause*.) that...care isn't really like prison then?

MRS SCOTT: When you're fit and healthy and able to look after yourself, yes, the idea of it *does* seem a bit like prison.

GEORGIA: (*Thinking she understands*). I know. Does everyone have their own little room, with their own bed and locker?

MRS SCOTT: Yes. But that's not the reason.

GEORGIA: Why then?

MRS SCOTT: (*Thoughtfully*). Well, it's because, when you've been able to take care of yourself all your life...lived the way you wanted to live...[*Chuckles*]...been a bit *silly* when you wanted to be...been *independent* - well, Georgie, you don't like the thought of giving all that up. (*Pause*.) On the other hand, when you *know* you can't look after yourself any longer, the thought of residential care, well, it doesn't seem so bad.

GEORGIA: (*Emphatically, to convince herself*). But, Scottie, you can look after yourself.

MRS SCOTT: (*Rubbing her leg gingerly*). Well, Georgie, I thought I could, but now I'm not so sure. (*Pause*.)

GEORGIA: I know! You can come and stay with us! With me, and Mum and Dad. You'll have a bed in my room and I'll lend you Avocado to cosy into and ...

MRS SCOTT: (*Laughing, shaking her head*). Goodness me, no. Your mum and dad wouldn't want an old fruit bat like me moving in.

GEORGIA: (*Sadly, insistently*). But *I* would want you!

MRS SCOTT: I know you would, dearie. (*Patting GEORGIA'S shoulder*.) But really, I'll be fine in residential care. You can visit me and we can still have fizzy orange and biscuits. Can't we?

GEORGIA: (*Unconvinced*). Yes.

MRS SCOTT: There is one *very important* thing you can do for me, though.

GEORGIA: What?

MRS SCOTT: Remember plan B?

GEORGIA: (*Trying to remember*). Plan B?

MRS SCOTT: Remember? *My most precious possession?*

GEORGIA: Oh, yes. Where *is* Norman?

MRS SCOTT: (*Smiling*). Where he always is...(*Pause*)...out there...

GEORGIA/MRS SCOTT: (*Together*). ...*surveying His Kingdom!*

(*Doorbell rings.*)

GEORGIA: That'll be Mr Jones.

(*MUSICAL LINK.*)

(*GEORGIA goes to answer door. Lights go down on set. GEORGIA skips downstage back to where she was when her story began. Lights come up on AVOCADO'S position.*)

GEORGIA: (*To AVOCADO*). It was Mr Jones. He had sent for an ambulance and Scottie was taken to hospital. If she's all right, she'll be going into Care. I told Mum all about it...well, not *all*. I didn't tell her about Plan B. I didn't tell her that Scottie can't take Norman, her *most precious possession* with her. You'd love Norman, Avvie. He's fluffy and he's sleepy and he's *scrummy*...

MUM: (*Off*). Georgia!

GEORGIA: Coming! (*Skips off.*)

AVOCADO: Norman. Yeah, he's fluffy and sleepy and scrummy, all right! He's also Mrs Scott's cat! The cat Dad chases out of the garden all the time! *The cat Dad can't stand!*

(*MUSICAL LINK.*)

Anyway, next morning Dad went off to work and Georgia went off to her music lesson. Mum was having a cup of tea...(*MUM enters with cup of tea.*) when...(*Doorbell rings and MUM puts down cup and goes to the door and opens it. A man is standing there.*)

MR JONES: Mrs Brown?

MUM: Yes.

MR JONES: Georgia's mum?

MUM: Yes.

MR JONES: Good. My name's Jones. I'm a social worker. (*Produces cat basket from out of sight.*) This is Norman. (*Lifts carrier bag.*) And this is his bowl and tins of cat food. It's very good of you to—

MUM: Norman?

MR JONES: Yes. Mrs Scott's cat. You know, the accident. Mrs Scott?

MUM: Oh. Oh, yes. The accident—

MR JONES: Yes, we've been keeping an eye on Mrs Scott. Luckily it wasn't too serious. Bruised her leg. But she'd been lying for quite some time. A bit shaken up, she was.

MUM: (*Sympathetically*). Oh, poor Mrs Scott—

MR JONES: Yes, very good, was Georgia, though. Wrapped Mrs Scott in a rug and phoned me.

MUM: I see.

MR JONES: (*Looks at basket*). So here he is. *Norman*.

MUM: (*Taking basket*). Yes, but why—?

MR JONES: Means the world to Mrs Scott, does old Norman. She wouldn't hear of anyone looking after him but your Georgia.

MUM: *Looking after* him! But—

MR JONES: Very kind of you to give him a home.

MUM: *Home!* But we, er, I can't—

MR JONES: (*Unheeding*). Very kind *indeed*.

MUM: But my husband—

MR JONES: Should I speak to your husband—?

MUM: (*Panicking*). *No!* (*Quieter*.) Er, no, really. I'll tell him.

MR JONES: Fine. (*Lays carrier bag inside door*.) Then I'll be in touch.

MUM: Oh, Mrs Scott. Is she in hospital?

MR JONES: Yes. For a check-up. And a rest, as much as anything. When she comes out she's agreed - *at long last* - to go into one of our residential care homes. You know 'The Pines' in Daisy Avenue? (*Chuckles*.) Giving it a *test drive*, she says.

MUM: (*Thoughtfully*). I see.

MR JONES: Quite a character, is our Mrs Scott. Well, 'bye, then. (*Exits*).

MUM: 'Bye. (*Closes door, lays down basket, and looks round in a panic. SINGS.*)

Oh dearie dearie dearie dearie, mearie-mearie me!

It's really not my day!

Oh dearie dearie dearie dearie, mearie-mearie me!

Whatever will Dad say?

When he comes home he'll not be pleased,

Cats scare him stiff and make him sneeze,

His nose will block, his chest will wheeze,

Oh dearie dearie, mearie-mearie me!

AVOCADO: (*SINGS disdainfully*).

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dearie me!

Why all the care and fuss;

*Oh dear, oh dear, oh dearie me!
Dad need never suss;
Hide Norman then there'll be no row,
Feed him well. Don't let him miaow—*

(DAD trills from the hall "I'm home!" and AVOCADO, like MUM, goes into instant panic.)

*WOBBLING JELLIES! That's Dad now!
Oh dearie dearie, mearie-mearie me!*

(MUM picks up basket and dashes about in a blind panic.)

MUM: *Oh dearie dearie dearie dearie, mearie-mearie me! (Calling to DAD.)
Hello, dear, is that you? (Then to self again SINGING.)
Oh dearie dearie dearie dearie, mearie-mearie me!
Dad's here, what shall I do?
I can't leave Norman lying there,*

AVOCADO: *Hurry! Take him up the stairs!*

MUM: *I'll hide him here, behind this chair;
Oh dearie dearie, mearie-mearie me!*

MUM & AVOCADO: *Oh dearie dearie dearie dearie, mearie-mearie, mearie-mearie, dearie dearie, mearie-mearie me!*

(Enter DAD. Hangs up coat with an air of suppressed excitement.)

MUM: *(Feigning normality).* Hello. Eh, how was work—?

DAD: *(Jokingly assertive).* Sit down, dear. You and I are having drinkies. Yes, a nice sherry, I think. *(Goes to cabinet and pours two drinks. Hands one to MUM.)*
Bottoms up!

MUM: *(Distracted and puzzled).* Bottoms, er, I...I had a visitor this morn—

DAD: *(Mock sternness).* Silence, woman!

MUM: But, Ralph, I did. Really. A Mr—

DAD: *(Excited).* Ask me. Go on! Ask me!

MUM: What about?

DAD: Ask me about our holiday in Windermere. Go on, ask me. Go on.

MUM: Holiday? Winderme...? When?

DAD: Today. Now. Pack. We're leaving after lunch. When Georgia gets back.

MUM: But...what? I mean, only yesterday we told Georgia we couldn't manage a holiday this year.

DAD: *(Enjoying her bewilderment).* Indeed we did.

MUM: Well then...

DAD: But that was *before* the Area Manager offered me a loan of his caravan in The Lake District for a whole week - *starting today!* Isn't that...*(Picks up MUM swings her round.)...wonderful?* *(Releases her. MUM,*

unsmiling, stands shaking her head emphatically.) And it's a big six-berther... and it's on a site by the lake and...and...and why are you shaking your head like that?

MUM: We can't.

DAD: What d'you mean, *can't*?

MUM: We can't go on holiday.

DAD: Why ever not?

MUM: Norman.

DAD: Norman? Who's Norman when he's at home?

MUM: *(Aside).* I wish he *was* at home!

DAD: What? What did you say?

MUM: Er, well, it's just that Georgia's friend—

DAD: *(Interrupting).* A little pal. I see. Fine. He can come too. We'll have a word with his parents—

MUM: No. But. Listen...

DAD: *(Not listening).* Yes. I'll lend him my small rod. He'll like fishing...

MUM: *(Aside).* He certainly likes *fish*...

DAD: Fine, then. We'll start packing and—

MUM: *(Interrupting).* No! He's here. Norman is here!

(MUM points behind chair. Puzzled, DAD goes over, looks in the basket and leaps backwards in horror.)

DAD: *(Pointing).* Tha...that's not a Norman. A-a *boy*. That's. That's *a cat!* *(Pause.)* That's *that* cat! What's he doing here?

MUM: Georgia's friend Mrs Scott had an accident. She had to go into hospital. Georgia promised her she would...*we* would look after Norman.

DAD: But, but you *know* how I feel about...you *know* how they...how *he*...I just don't *like* cats! *(Pause.) Cats and me do not agree!*

MUM: But, dear. You don't *really* know that, do you? We've...*you've* never *had* a cat. You've never *really* given them a chance.

DAD: Chadce? Neber gived theb a...? Listed. Go od. Just listed *(Rubs sinuses.)* By dose is blocking up as we speak. *(Sniffs loudly several times.)*

MUM: But, dear. Don't you think that just might be, well...imagination?

DAD: *(Nose very blocked).* Ibagida...? Ibagi...? Course dot! Dorbad! Do you bead..? Are you actually sayig that because of Dorbad our holiday is off? Do way! *Do way!* Dorbad will have to go into keddels. Where's the Yellow Pages...

(Goes to phone table and picks up Yellow Pages. Flicks pages angrily.)

AVOCADO: Dad was not pleased. *Dorbad* was definitely headed for catty *residential care*...

DAD: Let's see. Yes. Kilts...Kitcheds...Ah, here we are. The very thing. Keddels...
(Enter *GEORGIA* unnoticed by *DAD*.) Yes. Here. The Cat's Cradle. (Sniffs loudly.) *Cedtral heatig, cosy blackets, all the cobforts of hobe*...

GEORGIA: Hi, Mum. Hi, Dad. (Sees basket and squeals with delight.) *Norman!*
(Dives for the cat basket, lies down and peers in. Looks at *MUM* then *DAD*.)
Scrummy! Told you he was *scrummy!* (Looks in at *NORMAN*.) What a shame. Poor Norrie Porrie. All locked up. Georgia will let you out.

MUM/DAD: No/Do!

DAD: Georgia, love. Cob here beside Daddy. (Pats settee. *GEORGIA* sits beside him.) Wodderful news, sweetheart. Dad's boss has offered—

GEORGIA: (Interrupting). Why are you talking that funny way?

DAD: (Stretches sinuses). *Nnn! Nnnnnnn!* (Sniffs.) It's all right, precious. Yes. Daddy's boss is letting us have his caravad at *Widderbere*. For a *whole weeked. This weeked!* Dow isd't that super?

GEORGIA: Is *Widderbere* far away?

DAD: No, dot too far. It's id the Lake District.

GEORGIA: Would we go there in the car?

DAD: (With sudden hope). Yes, pet. Yes, we would.

GEORGIA: *Norman hates cars.*

DAD: (Grins ingratiatingly). Do probleb. Ah! (Testing sinuses.) *Nnnnnnnn.* Better. (Pause.) *Dorbad wod't* have to go in the car.

GEORGIA: Why not?

MUM: Now, Ralph!