

JOHN (MR JONES) I'll never forget the day. She fell in the bathroom. Broke her leg. It's my fault, I'd mopped it and it was still wet. But then, Muriel has always been so light on her feet, so nimble. When we were courting we were always out dancing. Ted Heath, Syd Lawrence and all that. We managed to keep it up while we were married too, but not as much as we'd have liked, what with the children. She always kept herself trim. Not like me. You can see I've put on a bit of weight, especially since I had to take over in the kitchen department. She lost her memory, you see, and I didn't think it was safe. But she wouldn't listen. We found a way to do it together. I did most of the work and she helped, if you know what I mean. It mattered to her that she kept things nice. She was always house proud.

DOCTOR Muriel Jones. 88 year old lady. Married. Admitted 29 May following a fall at home. Mild concussion. Fractured neck of left femur. Surgery successful. She's made a good recovery. Seems quite forgetful but no record of dementia. No record of care services: her husband is her main carer. Refer to the Discharge Team.

MURIEL (MRS JONES) The nurses are so nice. They keep coming round with cups of tea. They say I'm going home today. My hip is hurting a lot as I've been sitting in this chair so long. I keep wanting the toilet after all the tea but I'm trying not to keep asking as I don't want to be a bother. I just want to get home.

JOHN I had a phone call. From the hospital. I was just getting ready to go out to the bus. I don't drive now. My eyesight's not so good and the roads are so busy. But we've a good bus service. It stops right outside the door, which is handy. Anyway, I forget his name but he said Muriel would be coming out later that morning and would someone be at home? Of course, I said I would be, but I wasn't expecting her out till Monday at the earliest. He said, no, she's fine. She's done well. They'll be putting in a re-something or other 'package' to start as soon as she gets home. In the end, I waited in all day and they didn't bring her back until 7 o'clock – she'd had to give up the bed and from what I can gather had been sitting around all day waiting for her medication. It took me hours to settle her when she got in, her head was all over the place.

KIM I am the manager of the agency that provides the local authority with re-ablement services. We try to get people as independent as possible in the hope they won't need care long-term, though often this isn't possible for our older clients. I visited Muriel and spoke with her and her husband. He is the primary carer and asked that we communicate through him. They have a dog, rather elderly but friendly and I was assured it would be no trouble to workers when they visit. Mr Jones is a little frail himself but he assures me that he is willing to help his wife in her recovery. I gather Mrs Jones sometimes uses Tena pads at night. I recommend two calls a day to start with, morning to provide assistance with dressing and washing, and evening to help with preparation for bed. I understand that OT have visited and provided a commode and some rails. We'll keep going in for

up to six weeks or until we feel that Muriel has recovered as much independence as she can.

JOHN That first night Muriel was home and the next day were very difficult. I don't know how I got through it, to be honest. Thank goodness we have a sofa bed in the lounge, though it's a bit low. She can sleep on that till she's better. Our daughter's going to come at the weekend and maybe she can help me get her bed downstairs. She's got to come all the way from Newcastle. I hope the traffic's not too bad. Anyway, as I was saying, I had a heck of a job getting Muriel into her night things, she woke up umpteen times calling out so I was up and down the stairs all night long and then the next morning when I was getting her out of bed, we both nearly came a cropper on top of each other. Her balance is terrible and I was tired and dizzy after not sleeping and with the anxiety, I suppose. I'd had a call from the welfare people the day before. They said they'd be there at 9 but I couldn't keep Muriel in bed that long – we've always been early risers – and in the end they didn't turn up till half ten by which time I'd done all the hard work.

MURIEL It's good to be home but it doesn't really feel like home when I'm not in my proper bed. I don't like John having to get me dressed. It's not right. He's going to be ill himself at this rate and then where will we be?

SANDRA I'm Sandra. I've worked as a re-ablement worker for two years now. I visited Mrs Jones for the first time this morning. She's a nice lady. Her husband's sweet too. They're obviously very close. It's nice to see that. We see a lot of people who are on their own. Sometimes we're the only ones they see all day. He'd already got her up and dressed by the time I got there. I'm afraid I was later than planned as I'd had to cover another visit for that new girl, Fay, who's gone off sick again. I think she's going to be one of those who don't stick it for long. Some don't. Anyway, it gave me time for a bit of a chat with them. That was nice. We're usually so rushed we have to whizz in, do what's needed and get out. We're supposed to help people learn to be more independent, but honestly there sometimes isn't the time to do it properly. I don't suppose we'll be here for more than a couple of weeks as I can't see she's going to get much better. She's a bit forgetful, which is a bit of a worry, but as long as she's got him, she'll be all right. At least she's not heavy and not one of those who moan all the time!

JOHN They've been coming three weeks now, twice a day. Usually we get the same girl. Sandra. She's all right, I won't complain. I don't know the others so well. Some of them don't speak English, but they seem very nice. They seem to just do the minimum, though. Sandra said she was there to help Muriel get used to doing things on her own, but the truth is I was doing pretty much everything for her before she had the fall, and I still am. Muriel's finding it all a bit of a strain, I think, and doesn't take well to using the commode, but she's been used to pads for a while now so it's not too bad. I've learned how to do that sort of thing. Sandra gives her a wash twice a week. Our daughter came. Carol. I'm afraid she thinks her mum should be in a home. She thinks it's too much for me. We nearly had an argument, but

I could see Muriel was getting upset and so we agreed to talk it over later. But neither Muriel nor I want her to go in a home. This is her home. I'm not saying we'd rule it out. Only...not just yet.

**MURIEL** If you were to ask me I'd say I'm fine. But nobody does ask me. I have these people come in, they seem to know what they're doing. There seems to be so many of them, and I'm no good with faces any more. They all say they want to help but I'd say, what for? I'm all right. John tells me I was in hospital, and I think that's right because I can remember lots of nurses, and I can't get about like I used to and I've got a scar on my leg. It hurts a bit. I don't like having strangers in the house and I don't like them washing me. Some of them rush me and are a bit rough. I need to take my time. John tells me my daughter came to visit, which I suppose was nice. Something wasn't right with her, I think, but I can't remember what.

**KIM** I had a phone call from Mr Jones this morning. He sounded quite upset. Sandra had told him that she wouldn't be coming again after tomorrow as the package has ended. I asked him if the social worker had been to do an assessment but it seems they are self-funders. Like a lot of people I think he thought his wife would go on getting care for free, like on the NHS. I said, did nobody explain to you that you'd been assessed as having assets over twenty three and a half thousand, and that until you got down to that you'd have to pay for your own care? He wasn't sure. It's not the first time I've seen this. People don't understand the system and they don't like to ask. It's not something people are used to, you see. And why would they be? Anyway I explained that we had to end our involvement with them and that they could choose another agency. There are plenty of them. I advised him he should look around to make sure he was getting what he wanted.

**JOHN** I felt such a fool. I suppose even at our age you can get into a new routine and I'd just about got used to them coming in twice a day, though they weren't always on time. But we liked to see Sandra. She said she'd become a grandmother to a little boy, four months old now. I said Muriel would love to see him, and she said she'd bring him round someday. I don't suppose she will now. Muriel loves babies. You know what women are like. Eventually I spoke to the social worker on the phone after lots of tries where I had to dial this number for one thing and then another number for something else and then it just rang and rang. It seems we have to pay now if we want Muriel to have care. But it's not about wanting it. Since she's been in hospital she's got a lot less steady and having a bit of trouble too with, you know, incontinence, and I've had to clean her up once or twice. I just can't do it on my own, especially now I've got used to having the help. I thought the social worker would arrange for someone else to call but she just sent me a list of agencies. It went on for pages and pages. How am I meant to know which one to call or what to ask? It felt like trying to pick a winner in the Grand National, though I'd probably do better at that as at least I know something about horse racing! In the end, Ivy, who lives across the road, told me about the people who help a friend of hers so I gave them a call and they're going to come out to see what they can do. So we're going to have to start all over again.

ANDREW I am the owner of one of the largest private care agencies in the region, and if I may say so, one of the best. I met with Mr and Mrs Jones today. I explained that we specialise in providing a personal service to all our clients, tailored to their wishes and needs. We believe in forming a good relationship with our clients, and our care staff are carefully picked for their qualities of empathy and compassion as well as their skills. Some of our clients have been with us for many years. We offer a range of packages to suit all needs.

JOHN The Boss, Andrew as he insists on being called, came to us today. You don't know who to trust these days but Ivy had heard they are decent enough. I gather they're part of a bigger company and this is their local office. I suppose it doesn't matter that much in the end, it's the quality of the people who come in to your home that matters. I have to say I was a bit surprised at their prices. £20 an hour, and more at weekends. That's over £600 a month if we have two half hour calls a day. I will have to consider our budget very carefully. We're not rich, you know, but I suppose we could afford it if we're careful. But it wasn't what we were expecting. I've got a pension from my job that'll help cover it. Muriel has a small pension, and we've some savings put by. I was worried we'd have to sell the house, you hear such stories, but Andrew assured me that that wouldn't be required while I was still living in it. That seemed a bit hard, and I must admit I wondered how long we could afford to live! I had a moment of panic and I said, what if it comes to the point where she needs a nursing home, but he said she's a long way off that for now.

CAROL It's outrageous! Mum and Dad have worked all their lives, paid their taxes, done everything properly. And now, when they get to old age and they need a bit of help they're told, nope, you're on your own! I mean, whatever happened to the welfare state? It's not fair. I'd move down to help them but the children are just going through their exams and we both have jobs up here. I guess I'll get have to get used to the M1. I can't say I fancy it, though.

MURIEL Who are these people who keep coming in? There seem to be a lot of them. I don't know quite what they're talking about. Something to do with John, I think. Where is he? Is he all right?

JOHN We settled on two calls a day on weekdays and just one at weekends. Weekends and bank holidays are more expensive, of course. But I've cashed a couple of ISAs and that will help us through for a bit. I'm thinking about putting in a shower room downstairs. I'll need to see how we're doing financially. One good piece of news is that Muriel is now going to a day centre twice a week – though we call it her club! She was getting very bored in the house and because I don't drive we can't get out much. They have their own bus, which is a big help, and if she uses her wheelchair they can take that too. I can't say it's cheap. We pay about £80 for it each time, including the transport, but she gets a nice lunch and she's made some friends there. I had to cash in some more savings to pay for it, but I think it's worth it. It gives me a break, you see, so I look upon it as an investment. I can get stuck into the housework and do some extra shopping and if the

weather's fine I can go for a walk. The doctor says I need to take a bit more exercise because I am getting a bit overweight. I said I do enough keeping the house tidy and helping Muriel, but he recommended I go for a walk, so that's what I do, weather permitting. Carol bought me one of those i-pad things and showed me how to order things online, and that makes life a lot easier. Before, I used to pop round the corner to get everything, and though they're very nice, they don't have the variety and they're very expensive. Now we can get frozen meals and everything, all delivered to the door. It's a big help, and I admit I do like to get out a bit. But, the truth is, even when I am out I find myself worrying about her. I shouldn't, I know, because they look after her very well at the day centre, but I can't seem to get out of the habit. Still, at least I get to see a few different faces.

ANDREW We've had a bit of an argument. Mr Jones has been phoning up lately complaining the girls haven't been turning up on time. I explained that we have a leeway either side which we try to keep to, but sometimes things happen. He said that now his wife's going to the day centre it matters more what time they come. If they're late, he says, she misses her transport. I can see his point, but there's not much I can do. He wanted us to come at seven o'clock, but I said the earliest we could do was eight. He says his wife doesn't like the girls who come. He says she can't understand what they say. I remind him that we only employ experienced care workers and I ask him if he can be a bit more precise about what the problem is. He says the girls don't always stay for the full time, they're in a rush. I said they all have heavy workloads, we do our best to meet everyone's requirements, but we can't guarantee everything.

JOHN I get so frustrated. Muriel doesn't mind so much, but I get worried on her behalf and I can see she's not happy. The girls who come are all right, some of them, but I find I don't get much change from the management. It takes ages to get through to them, and when you do you don't speak to the same person. I did get through in the end, and I told them, they need to come on time especially on the days she goes to her club. You see, they've changed their transport arrangements without consulting us and now they come a bit earlier and they won't wait if she's not ready. I got a bit het up, I must admit, and I said that if they can't provide what we want we'll have to go elsewhere. He didn't quite say, well go on then, but, well, you know... Anyway I've managed to speak to some friends and to cut a long story short they said we should try somewhere else if we're not happy. But it's not that simple. I suppose it's the case of the devil you know. And some of the carers are very nice. There's one, Helena, who Muriel really likes. Although we don't always understand what she says, because of her accent, and we know they have to employ foreign workers, but she is very patient, very gentle, and if we're lucky she will come most days. So I think we'll stay where we are. Maybe, now I've had a word with Andrew, things will get better. I really don't want to have the bother of finding another agency. Once they're in your house it feels difficult to get rid of them, if you see what I mean. And I have just about got most of them trained to know where things are and what not. I understand that people go on holiday and go off sick, and also they need to bring in new people who have to be shown the ropes, but really, so

much seems to fall on us to make it work. I almost think I'd be better doing it myself. But then I think: steady on. I can't do everything.

HELENA I have been care worker for one year. I like this work. I have two small children and I am able to combine this with picking them up from school. The only thing I don't like is the rush, rush, rush. The agency keep saying I can do this, I can do that. I have to spend so much time in car, and that is not what I like. And old people, they don't like to be made to rush. So I try to make things a little bit good for my old ladies and my old gentlemen. I am supposed to have break, but if I have cup of tea with some of them that means I get to have break and to have little talk. It is good to talk. I like all my old people but I have, how you say, a soft spot for Mrs Jones. She is very nice lady. She used to be teacher. I say I would like to be teacher someday. She does not remember so well things now, but she say a lot about her school. I like to listen to her when I can. But there is so little time.

CAROL I was astonished dad had done it. I mean spoken up for himself. He's not usually so assertive, but I said, well done. The agency was getting a bit cocky, in my opinion, and was messing mum around a lot. Some days, dad said they turned up two hours late. And there's mum waiting to go to the loo! I said, if they can't provide the service he ought to take his custom elsewhere. But he said it would be an awful bother. I asked him what he was paying but he wouldn't say. Just told me not to worry. I wish he'd tell me. I bet it's a lot.

JOHN Things seem to have settled down between us and the agency. Andrew even paid us a call to see how we're getting along. Maybe they're losing business and want to keep the customers they've got. I don't know. Anyway I was able to raise another little concern I have. Call me old fashioned but I like to have an invoice on paper. The company switched over to electronic invoicing recently and I find that hard to cope with. We don't have a printer, you see. I know it's the way of things, but when I heard that they would charge for sending invoices by post, well, I couldn't help but think that it's just another way of making money. But it seems there's no negotiating that one. It's been a year now since Muriel came out of hospital and though she is doing very well, I have begun to worry about what happens when we get short of money. I understand the local authority has a duty to take over when we reach a certain level, but I want to know, does that mean we will have to have a different agency, or will we still have to pay for our own carers? And what if Muriel does need to go into a home? Or if, God forbid, I should fall ill? I'm a bit frightened to ask in case I hear bad news, but it is beginning to cause me a few sleepless nights, and I'm not sure who to ask. As far as I can see at our present rate we've got maybe another year before things get difficult, unless something bad happens in the meantime. It's all so complicated and I'm afraid of making a big mistake. I've had to sell some shares and I'm thinking about looking into equity release on the house, but it's a lot to cope with. I suppose I should have a talk with our daughter about it, but it's not a conversation I'm looking forward to. We'd hoped for better.

MURIEL I wish it hadn't come to this. I got ill, I think, and then everything changed. I'm almost helpless now. John seems worried about something, I can tell. I feel so sorry for him, poor man. He devotes his life to me, and he's not well himself. I can't think much about the future anymore. At our time of life you just live moment by moment, and do what you can.

End.