

Not For Sale

A ten-minute radio play by Norah Dempster.

Synopsis. An elderly woman living in her old family suburban home is being strongly pressured to sell by the local real estate agent. After a distressing incident she finally gives in but not everything turns out as expected.

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Characters in Order of Appearance:

Margy Jones: A widow, 81 years, loves her home and garden and has lived in the same suburb for many years. Kind to everyone.

Bill Docherty: A widower, 83 years, and Margy's long time neighbour. Loud and cheerful and likes his own jokes. Protective of Margy.

Mrs Lipton: Neighbour, 60 years, lives on the other side of Margy. Likes to speak in a posh voice. Nosy and critical.

Mr Sharples: Local real estate agent. Eager and pushy.

First School boy: 13 years. Polite and responsible.

Second schoolboy: 13 years. Noisy and rude.

Tradesman: 40 years. Builds and repairs fences. Worried, concerned and dignified.

Scene One: Margy's front garden.

MARGY: Was he here again this morning?

BILL: Yep.

MARGY: I don't want to go to the letterbox.

BILL: He was pretty quick today.

MARGY: He's dropping cards, that's why. (*worried*) Why won't he leave me alone? Did he go to your letterbox?

BILL: Nope. I was standing on my verandah. Gave him the eye. (*chortles*)

MARGY: Has the proper postman been?

BILL: Yeah, went straight past us both. At least no bills today. (*chortles again*)

MARGY: I'll check.

AUDIO: BANG OF LETTER BOX LID.

MARGY: He's left his card. Sharples Real Estate. With a phone number in big letters Listen! (*reads*) We have buyers interested in your house. Ring now. (*annoyed*) Why won't he leave me alone? I won't sell! I won't sell!

BILL: It's because we're over eighty. We ain't gonna last forever. And the yuppies are moving in. Townhouses everywhere. How long have you been in your house again, Margy?

MARGY: (*reminiscing*) Seventy- five years. Bill. I was only a little girl of seven. My dad was so proud. They spent their lives paying it off. Mum worked in that clothing factory that used to be at the end of the street.

BILL: For a pittance I suppose!

MARGY: Yes, but what a celebration when they paid it off! Even Mum had a beer that night.

MRS LIPTON: Hello, standing in the sunshine together?

MARGY: We're just collecting mail, Mrs Lipton. I'm going inside to do my dishes now.

MRS LIPTON: You haven't done your breakfast dishes yet? Mine are done. (*smugly*) And put away.

BILL: How's your son, Mrs Lipton? Settling back with you okay?

MRS LIPTON: (*irritated*) Fine, thank you. Perfectly fine. (*nosily*) And what was that big shiny car doing in our street?

BILL: I didn't see any car.

MRS LIPTON: (*adamantly*) Well! I did! And a man in a suit got out and stopped at all the letterboxes. Not mine though.

BILL: There'd be a reason for that. Mrs Lipton. I gotta go. A man's work is never done (*chortles*). See you later. Hope your son goes okay.

MARGY: Oh dear, I'm off to do my dishes, Mrs Lipton. Say hello to your son. He was always a nice boy.

MRS LIPTON: (*nosily*) You're not thinking of selling, are you? (*pause*) Huh! They've gone in.

AUDIO: MUSIC.

Scene Two: Inside Margy's house.

AUDIO: SOUND OF DISHWASHING AND RUNNING WATER.

DOORBELL RINGS.

MARGY: Now who would that be? Better take my apron off.

MR SHARPLES: Good morning, Mrs Jones. Lovely day isn't it?

MARGY: Mr Sharples! I'm just going to go...

MR SHARPLES: (*interrupts*) I'll just come in for one minute. Won't stay. I'm here to give you some good news. Mmmm! (*impressed*) Nice place you've got here. That kitchen stove's a real antique. Worth a lot, you know, nowadays.

MARGY: I- I... (*voice trails off*)

MR SHARPLES: (*with emphasis*) I have news for you. A buyer, a lovely man, lovely couple actually. Wife and two little kids. They have fallen in love with your house. You've hit the hot spot, Mrs Jones.

MARGY: Mr Sharples, I don't want...

MR SHARPLES: (*interrupts*) They've been up and down every street in the neighbourhood and (*with emphasis*) your house is the one they want. Professionals, all young professionals moving into this area now. And they will pay.

MARGY: (*firmly*) I 'm not selling.

MR SHARPLES: This suburb's changing, Mrs Jones. In fact, it has changed. You need to get yourself a nice little unit. I could help you with that too. They're offering money, Mrs Jones.

MARGY: I am not moving.

MR SHARPLES: Well, that's at the moment. You're not getting any younger. And it does need a few repairs. Fence not too good, I noticed. The time to cash in is now before the market drops. You know what markets are like, changeable like Melbourne weather, Mrs Jones (*laughs loudly*).

MARGY: (*takes a deep breath*) Mr Sharples. I am getting ready to go out.

MR SHARPLES: Here's my card. Ring any time. Good day, Mrs Jones. Have a nice day.

AUDIO: DOOR CLOSES.

MARGY: (*to herself*) What am I going to do? I know. I'll go outside and finish planting those bulbs along the fence, that'll cheer me up.

AUDIO: FOOTSTEPS AS SHE WALKS OUTSIDE.

Scene Three: Margy's front garden.

MARGY: And it's lovely out here in the morning sunshine.

AUDIO: NOISY SCHOOLBOYS LAUGHING AND SHOUTING.

SOUND OF BALL BOUNCING

FIRST SCHOOLBOY: (*calling*) Hello Mrs Jones.

MARGY: Hello, boys. Off to school are you?

FIRST SCHOOLBOY: Yep, we have to go, you know. It's compulsory. Would rather play football.

MARGY: (*laughing*) I had to go once but it was a long time ago.

SOUND OF FOOTBALL CRASHING IN VEGETATION.

MARGY: Your ball's come over the fence. I'll get it.

SECOND SCHOOLBOY: (*roughly*) Good shot! Good shot! (*laughs*) Ha, ha, ha!

FIRST SCHOOLBOY: That's not funny. Sorry Mrs Jones. Hope it didn't hit anything?

MARGY: Only that old begonia. I'll prop it up again.

FIRST SCHOOLBOY: Sorry, we didn't mean to.

SECOND SCHOOLBOY: (*defiant*) I did. I meant it! It's just an old garden.

MARGY: (*puffing slightly*) There you go, boys. Here's your ball.

SECOND SCHOOLBOY: Your fence is all rickety anyhow. It's had it! Ha, ha, ha!

FIRST SCHOOLBOY: That's rude. Thanks for the ball. Sorry, He's always in trouble. Broke a school window yesterday. Come on, we'll be late.

SECOND SCHOOLBOY: It was a dirty window anyway. Watch out your old fence doesn't fall down. Ha ha ha!

AUDIO: LOUD LAUGHTER AS THEY CONTINUE DOWN STREET.

PHONE RINGS INSIDE HOUSE.

MARGY: And there's my phone. Oh dear, this is not my day. I had better go inside and answer.

Scene Four: Inside Margy's house.

MARGY: (*picks up phone*) Hello darling, how are you. What have I been doing? That real estate man came right inside my house early this morning. Into my kitchen, I didn't know what to do. (*pause*)

What? You think your mother should sell? (*pause*)

An article in today's paper about old people staying in their homes and keeping young ones out of the housing market? But I have my old friend Bill next door. His wife has passed away. And your dad. (*pauses*)

All right dear. No I am not upset. It's all right. Have a nice day at work. Bye bye dear.

AUDIO: SOUND OF LANDLINE PHONE HANGING UP.

MARGY: What am I going to do?

AUDIO: MUSIC

Scene Five: Margy's front garden.

MARGY: It's a nice new day and I will forget all that selling talk and I'll get those bulbs in.

AUDIO: FOOTSTEPS AS SHE WALKS OUTSIDE.

MARGY: Oh my goodness! My goodness! My fence has fallen down! Bill, there you are! Look at my fence!

BILL: I just saw it. Could I come over and have a look?

MARGY: (*very upset*) Flattened to the ground. What am I going to do? I thought it would last. Was it windy last night?

BILL: No, Margy. Someone's knocked your fence down. Look, they've even taken out some palings and thrown them. Someone's pushed that on purpose.

MARGY: (*tearful*) Who would do that? I don't have money for a new one. And my poor bulbs.

MRS LIPTON. What's happened to your fence?

MARGY: Hello Mrs. Lipton. Someone in the night has flattened it. I know it was old but ...what am I going to do?

MRS. LIPTON: There's vandals around here. My son was home all night. We were watching television and never went out. And there's that car again. You're selling aren't you?

BILL: It's Mr Sharples. (*dryly*) Early this morning, Mr Sharples?

MR.SHARPLES: Good morning all. Someone's done a good job of your fence, Mrs Jones. (*laughs*) It's a sign, Mrs Jones, it's a sign. Time to sell and let someone else put a nice new high fence up here. With a modern garden behind and a beach umbrella.

MRS. LIPTON: Home invasions, that's what it is. And my son was inside all last night. We never went out.

AUDIO: SOUND OF SCHOOLBOY'S LAUGHTER

MRS. LIPTON. And here's those young vandals now. Bad mannered, the lot of them.

FIRST SCHOOLBOY: What happened to your fence?

MARGY: Good morning, boys. Someone did it in the night. I don't know who would do such a thing.

SECOND SCHOOLBOY: (*defensively*) It wasn't me.

FIRST SCHOOLBOY: That's the kind of thing you would do. You broke a window at school yesterday again.

SECOND SCHOOLBOY: Somebody else did that. Teacher knows. He's goin' to help me, he said. I never did nuthin'.

MR.SHARPLES: (*with authority*) Get off to school, boys. There are adults talking here.

MRS.LIPTON. Well, my son and I were in all last night.

MR. SHARPLES: Mrs Jones, You could put three town houses on this block. Like in the next street. Hit the hot spot, you would. Have you ever thought of that, Mrs Jones? I'd help find a nice little unit for you, safe and secure.

MRS LIPTON: I suppose you'll be after a good price. What are they selling for around here now?

MARGY: I feel shaken. I'll just go inside and sit down.

BILL: I'll come in and have a cup of tea with you, Margy. Good day, Mr Sharples. See you, Mrs Lipton.

Scene Six: Inside Margy's house.

AUDIO: MUSIC; SOUND OF CUPS AND SAUCERS. KETTLE BOILS.

MARGY: (*guiltily*) I shouldn't say this but I am so upset. Do you think it is Mrs Lipton's son? I haven't seen him since he got out of prison. And he was such a nice boy.

BILL: I reckon its Sharples. (*chortles*) He looks like a fence- ripper.

MARGY: And that schoolboy. He was horrid about my fence yesterday. I will have to sell. I don't have money for repairs. And I know there are other things that need doing. Like the stove. And the cupboard handles are broken. (*starts to cry*)

BILL: Now don't cry.

MARGY: I am so sorry. I know I shouldn't. It's going to cost a fortune. I am only on the pension. What am I going to do? I will have to ring up that Sharples man. He's right, my daughter's right, those newspaper articles are right. It's all too hard. (*sobs*)

BILL: (*tentatively*) Maybe you could come and live with me?

MARGY: Oh Bill, you are so kind.

BILL: You could have the front room. It's empty now. I'm not a bad cook.

MARGY: Oh Bill, I'm not sure. (*voice trails, pauses*) No. Bill, we are good friends but I don't think it would be right.

BILL: It would get them talking wouldn't it. (*chuckles*) But you're right. Wouldn't work out. But gee, I will miss you. We've been neighbours for thirty years.

MARGY: I'll ring that awful Mr Sharples up. Then I'll come back and have that tea.

AUDIO: DOORBELL RINGS.

MARGY: Would you answer it, Bill? While I phone. Where's my hanky? I need to wipe my face.

TRADESMAN: Excuse me. I've come about the fence.

BILL: (*a little belligerent*) You have, have you? A tradesman, are you?

TRADESMAN: Yes. I build and repair fences.

BILL: I know the likes of you pretending to look for work and preying on the elderly with scam prices.

TRADESMAN: I don't do that.

MARGY: (*returning*) I've rung him. I've done it. Thank you, no. I am selling my house.

TRADESMAN. I just need to —

BILL: (*firmly*) Excuse me, you heard the lady. She doesn't want her fence fixed. Go and bother someone else with your crooked deals.

TRADESMAN: (*with dignity*) Listen to me. I have something important to say.

MARGY: (*sighs*) All right. And there's Mrs Lipton coming up the path. (*resignedly*) Come on in, everybody. It's not going to be my house for much longer.

MRS LIPTON. That real estate man's arrived again right outside your house.

TRADESMAN: I know him. He sold me my place. I live in a town house in the next street.

BILL: (*aggressively*) In it together, are you?

TRADESMAN: (*confused*) I don't know what you mean.

MARGY: Now listen, Bill. He's trying to tell us something.

TRADESMAN: (*with dignity*) Thank you. I have just moved in with my fifteen-year-old son. His mother, my wife passed away recently. He is not coping. The other night...

MARGY (*interrupts*) You mean your son? My fence?

TRADESMAN: (*sadly*) Yes, you've got it. He's always been a good boy but we're in a new house in a new suburb and it's very difficult for him. He took our car out last night and drove it around these streets.

BILL: (*admiringly*) Well, that's not bad for a fifteen year old.

TRADESMAN: He realised it was wrong, tried to do a U-turn and knocked your fence down. There were no lights on in your place so he tried to stick the palings back but couldn't. He threw them on the grass.

MRS. LIPTON: See, I said it wasn't my son. He was only away for a little while. He's changed his ways now and become a volunteer.

MARGY: He always was a nice boy. And it wasn't that schoolboy either. And here's Mr Sharples.

BILL: Hello, Mr Sharples. It wasn't you either. (*chuckles*) I thought they were all young professionals moving in.

TRADESMAN: Look, I apologise. I will build you a fence for no cost. My son will help. I have to teach him.

MARGY: (*amazed*) Thank you so much. That's really kind.

BILL: (*extra loud and cheerful*) Ya wont have to sell. Whoopee ! I can fix those cupboard doors. Got a few spare handles in the shed.

MARGY: Oh my goodness. Everything's happening. Where's your son now?

TRADESMAN: He's waiting in the street to apologise.

MARGY: And his mum's just passed away. Do bring him in. I 'd better put the kettle on. Oh, Mr Sharples, are you going?

MR. SHARPLES: (*sadly*) You're not selling now, are you?

MARGY: No, I am not selling. Would you like a cup of tea, too?

MR SHARPLES: Well, I have walked a lot this morning. It's a long way between the letterboxes on these big sections.

MARGY: Come on then. Mrs Lipton, call your boy over too. We're all neighbours aren't we?
And I made some biscuits a couple of days ago. Waiting to be eaten.

BILL: It's good that the antique stove still works.

(ALL LAUGH)