

The Old Crowd

By

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A LOUNGE ROOM IN A FLAT. A BIRTHDAY PARTY HAS JUST TAKEN PLACE. THERE ARE THE REMAINS OF DRINKS AND SOME FOOD WITH DISCARDED WRAPPING PAPER AND A FEW PRESENTS. CHRISTINE, A WOMAN APPEARING TO BE IN HER FIFTIES, IS CLEARING UP AND SINGING 'Happy Birthday To Me'. THE DOORBELL RINGS.

CHRISTINE: It's open!

CHRISTINE DOESN'T TURN FROM HER CLEANING AS SHEREE, A WOMAN APPEARING TO BE IN HER FORTIES, ENTERS. SHE CARRIES A PRESENT.

CHRISTINE: (CONT) Okay. Who forgot something?

SHEREE: Surprise!

CHRISTINE TURNS AROUND AND TAKES A MOMENT TO RECOGNISE SHEREE.

SHEREE: (CONT) Happy birthday.

CHRISTINE: (UNSURE) Sheree?

SHEREE: (HANDING OVER THE PRESENT) Looks like I missed everyone else. No big loss. Your last birthday had more walking frames than a Rolling Stones concert.

CHRISTINE: My god! Sheree! It is you!

SHEREE: Was it the same old crowd? Who did I miss? Thomas? Is his hair still getting thinner while his gut gets thicker?

CHRISTINE: Look at you!

SHEREE: Was Olivia here? Did she leave her false teeth in the cake again?

CHRISTINE: What have you done?

SHEREE: (TWIRLING AROUND, SHOWING HERSELF OFF) Like it? After your last birthday get-together, I was fed up seeing everyone so decrepit. So I did something about it. I had a little work done.

CHRISTINE: A *little* work? Looks more like an excavation!

SHEREE: (HURT) I thought you'd be pleased. You're the one who always says "we're not getting any younger"

CHRISTINE: (GENUINE) I'm sorry. So, what did you do?

SHEREE: Everything. (POINTS OUT THE AREA OF WORK AS SHE NAMES IT) I've had abdominoplasty, blepharoplasty, augmentation mammoplasty, chemical peels, mastopexy and buttock augmentation. I've had rhinoplasty, rhytidectomy, otoplasty, suction-assisted lipectomy, labiaplasty, mesotherapy, collagen injections and chin and cheek augmentations.

CHRISTINE LOOKS HORRIFIED.

SHEREE: (CONT) What?

CHRISTINE: Labiaplasty?

SHEREE: It came free with the tummy-tuck.

CHRISTINE: This is horrible, Sheree. What's left of the real you?

SHEREE: The real me was in a nursing home, Christine. And you can't talk. You must be having some work done to stay like you do.

CHRISTINE: I've never had to resort to cosmetic enhancements.

SHEREE: But, we're 97, Christine. If you haven't had plastic surgery, how do you do it?

CHRISTINE: (CHANGING THE SUBJECT) Tell me more about the labiaplasty.

SHEREE: Actually, the big secret is ocelot glands.

CHRISTINE: Ocelots?

SHEREE: And the platypus spurs they use to paralyse the facial muscles.

CHRISTINE IS EVEN MORE HORRIFIED.

SHEREE: (CONT) What?

CHRISTINE: I can imagine what Olivia had to say about all this.

SHEREE: Olivia and I haven't spoken for while.

CHRISTINE: I'm not surprised.

SHEREE: As soon as I suggested the work she got all high and mighty about animal cruelty.

CHRISTINE: Ocelot glands?

SHEREE: Yes. Yes. But I'm working again, Christine.

CHRISTINE: Really?

SHEREE: They may have got rid of mandatory retirement, but they haven't disposed of ageism. It's an image conscious world. (PROUDLY) I'm head of marketing at Sandersons.

CHRISTINE: So, you did this to get work?

SHEREE: It's a youth-driven culture and I'll do whatever I can to stay in it.

DOORBELL RINGS.

CHRISTINE: It's open!

SHEREE: It's like you say, "we're not getting any younger"

OLIVIA, A WOMAN WHO APPEARS TO BE IN HER EARLY TWENTIES,
ENTERS. SHE CARRIES A PRESENT.

OLIVIA: Surprise!

CHRISTINE: (ALREADY SUSPECTING WHO THIS MUST BE) Oh no!

OLIVIA: I had the devil's own time getting here. Was this always a security block? I gave my name, but the guard insisted on seeing my ID. That wouldn't help. I don't look anything like my photo anymore. I must get that redone. And it'd say I was 97 and that'd mean birth certificates and ... So, I just gave him a blowjob and here I am. (SHE LOOKS AT THE PRESENT IN HER HANDS AND TRIES TO REMEMBER WHAT IT'S FOR.) Is it someone's birthday?

SHEREE: Christine's.

OLIVIA: Oh. Then this must be for Christine. (HOLDS PRESENT OUT TO THE GENERAL AREA BETWEEN CHRISTINE AND SHEREE)

CHRISTINE: (TAKING PRESENT) Olivia?

SHEREE: (DISBELIEF) What?

OLIVIA: Happy birthday, Christine.

SHEREE: (CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S TRUE) What?

OLIVIA: (TO CHRISTINE) You're still looking good. (TURNS TO SHEREE)
And you're ... (SQUINTS AT HER) ... Sheree?

SHEREE: You hypocrite! After everything you said to me about operations, you go and have everything with a wrinkle on it hammered out.

OLIVIA: (TRYING TO REMEMBER) Operations? (REMEMBERS) Oh, no. I didn't object to the operations. It was the treatment of animals.

CHRISTINE: Let's not start on the ocelot glands again.

SHEREE: For your information, I've switched to using free-range ocelot glands.

CHRISTINE: That'll get you back on the Greenpeace Christmas list.

SHEREE: Why does everyone fixate on the ocelot glands?

OLIVIA: I think someone is jealous because I look so fantastic.

CHRISTINE: Olivia, you look 20. In fact you look better than you did at 20.

OLIVIA: (SHEEPISHLY) I may have had a minor surgical procedure done.

SHEREE: Pot. Kettle.

OLIVIA: But no animals were harmed.

SHEREE: So what did you do? Sell your soul? Drink the blood of virgins?

CHRISTINE: Yes, Olivia. It can't all be done with carrot juice?

OLIVIA: What can't?

CHRISTINE AND SHEREE POINT AT OLIVIA'S BODY. OLIVIA LOOKS AT IT AND REMEMBERS.

OLIVIA: (CONT) Oh, this. I just had a simple, everyday, T.B.T.

SHEREE: Of course. A T.B.I have no idea what you're talking about.

OLIVIA: It's still in the experimental stage, but I think it's worked a treat.

CHRISTINE: It's like they scooped out the brain of a teenager and put yours in.

OLIVIA: Oh, you've heard about it?

SHEREE: What?!

OLIVIA: It is a total body transplant, after all. T.B. (THINKS IT OVER) T. But it's not as simple as it sounds. There's always the risk of rejection.

CHRISTINE: So your body belongs to some young woman off the street?

OLIVIA: (OFFENDED) Off the street? She's a uni student. I do have standards.

SHEREE: You have a go at me for ripping glands from the faces of ocelots and you're prepared to kill a human being to stay young.

OLIVIA: Kill? (REALISES) Oh, I see. You think the donor dies during the treatment. No, no, no, no, no. She's very happy.

CHRISTINE: As a disembodied brain?

OLIVIA: (CORRECTS HER) A disembodied brain in a jar! And that jar is connected to a simulation of a world wide Kon Tiki tour. It's all perfectly humane.

CHRISTINE: There's one thing I don't understand?

SHEREE: One?!

CHRISTINE: Why keep the brain alive at all? I mean, she's a 20 year old girl, I doubt she'd be using it?

OLIVIA: What kind of monster do you think I am?

SHEREE: Excuse me? Brain scoop?

OLIVIA: She gets her brain back. She rents her body to pay off her HECS. I've got it for three years. Then my brain comes out, hers goes back in and I go on a worldwide Kon Tiki tour until they find the next donor.

SHEREE: That's barbaric.

OLIVIA: Oh, right. Ocelot face.

SHEREE: (GRABBING OLIVIA AND SHAKING HER) Stop with the ocelots!

(SHE FREEZES IN PAIN) Ahh!

CHRISTINE: What's wrong?

SHEREE: My back! My back!

CHRISTINE: (HELPING SHEREE) Are you okay?

SHEREE: Careful. Careful.

OLIVIA: (LAUGHING) Oh my god. You've got arthritis! That's too much. You look younger but your bones are still creaking like an old rocking

chair. (LAUGHS) That's the funniest thing. Don't you think so ...

(GRASPS FOR CHRISTINE'S NAME) ... uh ...

CHRISTINE: You can't remember my name can you?

OLIVIA: Of course I can. It's ... uh ... you're ... uh ... your ... your birthday.
Happy birthday.

CHRISTINE: You've got dementia.

SHEREE: Ha! (GRABS HER BACK) Ow!

OLIVIA: If I had dementia don't you think I'd know it? (BEAT) Do I?

CHRISTINE: I'm disgusted.

SHEREE: Exactly.

CHRISTINE: At both of you! Look at you! With your ocelot glands and your brain scoops. You're not human anymore.

OLIVIA: (HURT) How can you say that?

SHEREE: You're just as old as we are.

OLIVIA: And you don't look 97.

SHEREE: We see you once a year on your birthday and you never change.

OLIVIA: Not for forty years.

SHEREE: While we get arthritis.

OLIVIA: and... and... that other thing that starts with an 'a'.

CHRISTINE: Alzheimers.

OLIVIA: You too?

SHEREE: How are you doing it, Christine?

CHRISTINE: It doesn't matter now. You've spoilt all my fun.

SHEREE: Fun?

CHRISTINE: Do you think I invite you over each year because we went to school together?

OLIVIA: We went to school together?

CHRISTINE: The fun of my birthday party was seeing how everyone else had aged.

OLIVIA: Does this mean you're not bringing out cake?

CHRISTINE: There's no point having a party any more. Not if technology helps you to look younger and younger.

SHEREE: (SUSPICIOUS) Younger than you, you mean.

CHRISTINE: I spent a fortune setting up a state of the art cryogenic chamber. Better than state of the art. Just so I can turn up once a year and get together with my old friends. My *old* friends. And then you two had to get yourselves fixed up. I might as well shut off the chamber and have a cup of Horlicks.

SHEREE: You freeze yourself?!

OLIVIA: Like an ice block?

CHRISTINE: And it's chewing up what's left of my inheritance. Every year the dollar devalues and I have to draw more of the principle to keep it going.

SHEREE: So you unthaw yourself one week every year and throw yourself a birthday party.

OLIVIA: Just to gloat at our expense?

CHRISTINE: Yes. Isn't that what you're doing? Flaunting your 20 year old body?

OLIVIA: She has a point.

SHEREE: No she doesn't! We thought she was our friend.

OLIVIA: Oh yeah. You bitch!

SHEREE: She's just been using us. Ruthlessly exploiting us for our age.

CHRISTINE: That should have made you feel younger at least.

SHEREE: (GATHERING HER STUFF) Don't expect us at next year's party.

OLIVIA: Aww, but I've already picked out next year's body!

SHEREE: Come on, Olivia. We're going.

OLIVIA: Okay. Bye! It's been fun.

CHRISTINE: Just go then. My other old friends will still turn up. And memory doesn't last. In three years you'll be back here, swapping letters from the Queen and trying to remember why she wrote them to you.

SHEREE: You know, Christine, I pity you. I'm losing my mobility, and Olivia's losing my memory.

OLIVIA: I'm losing my memory? When did that start happening?

SHEREE: But you're losing something much more than that. You're losing what's important in life. Friends. Family. Do you see your children? I doubt it. How would they like seeing their mother get younger than

them? And what about your grandchildren? You're losing the opportunity of seeing them grow up. Of taking care of them because their parents are too busy at work to bother looking after their own progeny and feel that since you're old you have nothing better to do than to take the kids off their hands. You've lost the – (SUDDENLY REALISES THE GLOOMY PICTURE SHE'S PAINTED) Is there room in your cryogenic chamber for two?

CHRISTINE: Of course there is. But *only* two.

SHEREE: How unfortunate. (THINKS IT OVER FOR A SECOND) Bye Olivia!

OLIVIA: Bye!

CHRISTINE: (TAKING SHEREE BY THE ARM AND LEADING HER OFF) You know, Sheree, when I thought this might have a chilling effect on our relationship, this wasn't quite what I had in mind.

THEY GO, LEAVING OLIVIA BEHIND

OLIVIA: What a top night! (SHE LOOKS AROUND) Where am I?

FADE OUT.