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## A Helping Hand

by Victoria Cooper

So, I bumped into old Mrs Fancy Knickers who lives down the road, you know the one, the one with five children and a hernia. I'd lent her my big choppers to help her prune her Buxus obelisks. No, I hadn't a clue what they were either but I found out they were just privet bushes; but fancier. She's an expert at all that origami stuff she is. Always got her shears out, ready to trim her bush.

Anyway, she started telling me how she had that empty nest syndrome; that she was so lonely and missed her kids. She said the house was silent now and that she felt like a stranger.

I thought to myself, silent? What I wouldn't give for a bit of silent. Just me, The Best of Des O'Connor and a box of Turkish Delight. Silent? What a thought. I told her ever since our Dawn got with that Michael down the road the one who wears corduroy Y fronts, things are never silent in our house.

She didn't know who I meant at first. So, I had to lend her my steps so I could show her his Mum, Mrs Lightbody's smalls on the line. Shocking it is. Honestly, I'm surprised the local constable hasn't asked her to take them down. They probably put off light aircraft with that unsavoury collection of underwear she likes to display in her front garden.

She said she'd never noticed the unmentionables or Mrs Lightbody and to be honest and I don't think I'm speaking out of turn here, she said she had become a bit, what they call...depressed. I told her, I don't have time to be depressed, you can't be depressed when you've got your head in a chip oven can you? What I wouldn't give for a bit of depressed I told her.

The closest I've been too depressed is when my Roy told me about his favourite pigeon Betty. Apparently, she's lost a lot of weight, just bone and feathers poor thing, utterly emancipated he says.

Anyway, before I knew it Mrs, ooh what's her name, you know Mrs Fascinator, the one with the brassy door knocker and a limp, the one who is "depressed", well she only went and invited me to play bridge. Bridge! I said I don't have time to play bridge not with my impetigo.

She got quite upset then, poor woman, she got all weepy. I had to lend her my hankie, lucky I didn't have any of our Leslie's mucky ones up my sleeve, I don't know how he gets them that colour, I really don't. She just went on and on about how she was lonely rattling about in that house all day by herself, until finally I'd had enough.

So, it's sorted. What? How did I help her out?

Well it was obvious wasn't it? She's pitching in with me on a Saturday night, stuffing saveloys and battering a sausage.