



YOUNG OLIVER

by Alan Brody

A SMITH SCRIPT

This script is protected by copyright laws.
No performance of this script – IN ANY MEDIA – may be undertaken without payment of the
appropriate fee and obtaining a licence.

For further information, please contact SMITH SCRIPTS at info@smithscripts.co.uk

YOUNG OLIVER

Alan Brody

Representation:

Paul Smith
Smith Scripts
P.O. Box 121
Somerset, TA21 ONB
United Kingdom

+44 7519 316916
[info@smithscripts.co.](mailto:info@smithscripts.co.uk)
[www.smithscripts.co.](http://www.smithscripts.co.uk)
uk

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Dr. Oliver Sacks – Early Thirties, An Oxbridge accent

Evelyn Erickson – Forties, A Migraine patient

Dr. Carol Friedman – Early Thirties, A neuroscientist, Dr. Arnold Friedman's daughter.

Dr. Arnold Friedman – Late Sixties, A neurologist

Dr. Muriel Sacks – Oliver's mother, Sixties, An anaesthesiologist

Dr. Samuel Sacks – Oliver's father, Sixties, A General Practitioner

Mike Ryan – Night Watchman at Beth Israel Hospital

TIME AND PLACE

1966 – 68

Various places the Bronx, New York and the Sacks flat in London

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The opening and closing film clips are taken from an interview with Oliver Sacks in September 2011. It can be found at

<https://www.webofstories.com/play/oliver.sacks/>

Some of the minor continuity additions might have to be dubbed over the existing footage.

A film clip of Oliver Sacks being interviewed in 2011)

OLIVER SACKS

I partly left England feeling that I was perhaps eccentric or would not fit well into the rigid medical hierarchies in England. And after my training was complete in neurology in California. . . . I hoped there might be interstices in medicine which I could occupy untroubled by collegial criticism or contact. . . I have been increasingly distressed over the years by various analogies for the nervous system. Originally there were telephone analogies, then there were computer analogies and people speak of the brains as hardware and of various programs in the brain as software. And I wanted to say “Yes but where is the person.”

(The screen goes black. The LIGHTS COME UP on a doctor’s consulting office. YOUNG OLIVER SACKS, a man in HIS thirties, is making notes in longhand in a notebook. HE has the fit body of a former weight lifter, an open and inquiring face and the easy, enthusiastic manner of youth. Beside HIM is a file of cases that HE consults occasionally. It is autumn, 1965. There is a knock on the door.)

OLIVER

Come!

(EVELYN ERICKSON, a woman in HER forties, comes in. OLIVER stands.)

You’re Mrs. Erickson.

(HE speaks with something of an Oxbridge accent.)

MRS. ERICKSON

I know who I am.

OLIVER

I’m Oliver Sacks.

MRS. ERICKSON

Where’s Dr. Friedman?

OLIVER

I’m a member of his migraine team.

MRS. ERICKSON

Doctor Friedman’s been seeing me.

OLIVER

He's asked me take over your case. I have all his notes. He must have told you.

MRS. ERICKSON

I want Dr. Friedman.

OLIVER

He must have phoned or written to you.

MRS. ERICKSON

No.

OLIVER

He's meticulous about procedures like that.

MRS. ERICKSON

He's been seeing me for two years. Why would he all of a sudden turn me over to a trainee?

OLIVER

(Smiles)

I'm not a trainee. I'm a doctor. I can give you all my credentials if you'd like.

MRS. ERICKSON

It's very rude.

OLIVER

I'm sorry?

MRS. ERICKSON

Of him. Not you.

OLIVER

He does like to consult about cases with the members of his team. Lately, he's been having me meet with patients whose migraines are especially frequent.

MRS. ERICKSON

Yes, well, that would be me, wouldn't it.

OLIVER

(Indicates the case folder)

So it seems. Do you want to tell me about it in your own words?

MRS. ERICKSON

(SHE sizes HIM up. HE lets HER.)

One or two days I'll be fine. I'll think I'm finally free. I can enjoy my time with my family, and then it will hit me and stay for what seems like forever. It's so hard on them. They can't do anything for me. We all just have to wait it out. My husband is so patient. And my children stay so quiet whenever . . . I hate putting them through this all the time.

OLIVER

I can imagine.

MRS. ERICKSON

(Sharply)

No, you can't.

OLIVER

(After a moment)

Can you describe what happens?

MRS. ERICKSON

What do you mean?

OLIVER

When it hits you. Can you describe it?

MRS. ERICKSON

It's in there.

(SHE nods toward the file)

OLIVER

It's better if I hear it from you.

MRS. ERICKSON

I don't like to talk about it.

OLIVER

In the notes you call them premonitions.

MRS. ERICKSON

. . . Yes.

OLIVER

That's not what they are, though.

MRS. ERICKSON
Yes, they are.

OLIVER
A premonition is just a feeling.

MRS. ERICKSON
Yes.

OLIVER
But you experience more than just a feeling.

MRS. ERICKSON
I don't know what you. . .

OLIVER
You actually see something, don't you?

MRS. ERICKSON
(After a slight pause)
That would be crazy.

OLIVER
Is that why you called them a premonition for Dr. Friedman? Because you think it might mean that you're crazy?

MRS. ERICKSON
No. It's just a. . .

OLIVER
What if I told you they weren't premonitions at all, that they're actually physical?

MRS. ERICKSON
Why didn't Dr. Friedman say that?

OLIVER
I couldn't say. But you've been seeing him for two years now, and I have a feeling you're as frightened of your hallucinations as you are of the pain of the migraines.

MRS. ERICKSON
I don't have hallucinations.

OLIVER
They're actually a part of the migraine attack.

MRS. ERICKSON

They can't be. They don't hurt. They're just warnings.

OLIVER

But you do see something.

MRS. ERICKSON

No!

(Silence)

Yes.

OLIVER

Can you describe it?

MRS. ERICKSON

It's hard.

(HE waits. Then, with some difficulty)

...Everything starts to shimmer.

OLIVER

Shimmer.

MRS. ERICKSON

Everything I look at. With light inside and around. It would be beautiful if it weren't so frightening. Sometimes I let myself notice how beautiful it is and that's when it starts to fade and the pain moves in.

OLIVER

Is it always a shimmer?

MRS. ERICKSON

Sometimes it's things that just change shape. Animals or faces or things in the room. As soon as it starts I go into my own room so I can be alone. I know what's coming next.

OLIVER

I want you to know that this is a very common symptom of migraine.

MRS. ERICKSON

Is it?

OLIVER

It's called an aura. It often precedes the cerebral dilation that results in the extended pain.

MRS. ERICKSON

Are you telling me that other people see those things?

\

OLIVER

I'm sure Dr. Friedman would tell you that.

MRS. ERICKSON

Well, he . . .

(OLIVER waits)

did ask me . . . once. Like you did. But I got angry.

OLIVER

You were frightened.

MRS. ERICKSON

I was afraid he would say I was crazy

OLIVER

I can promise that you're not. It's a common part of the illness of the migraine.

MRS. ERICKSON

And everyone else. . .

OLIVER

Not everybody, but many, many sufferers. A complete migraine takes many different forms. That's why we're grateful you agreed to be a part of this study. We're hoping it will lead to safe and effective ways of treating migraine.

MRS. ERICKSON

Why is it taking so long?

OLIVER

We have to be as thorough and as accurate as we can with all our data.

MRS. ERICKSON

Well, now you've got all my data. What am I supposed to do? Wait around until you get everyone else's, and then wait some more for you to interpret your data? You might as well read chicken entrails.

OLIVER

(Smiling)

Sometimes it feels like that.

MRS. ERICKSON

And what do I do with all this pain while I'm waiting?

OLIVER

Dr. Friedman has you on ergotamine. I can increase the dosage for you and you can report back to me if it's helpful. We'll have to do it incrementally and I can't promise anything. It's still fairly new.

MRS. ERICKSON

All right. Anything.

OLIVER

We'll start out with five more milligrams.

MRS. ERICKSON

That won't do anything.

OLIVER

Try to work with us.

(Pause. MRS. ERICKSON makes a gesture of surrender.)

Thank you.

MRS. ERICKSON

Dr. Friedman never thanks me.

OLIVER

We have different styles.

MRS. ERICKSON

They used to call it bedside manner – back when doctors used to make house calls.

OLIVER

My father is a general practitioner. He still makes house calls in London.

MRS. ERICKSON

That's your accent.

OLIVER

Yes.

MRS. ERICKSON

Well, I guess the British are more. . .

OLIVER

Traditional.

MRS. ERICKSON

I was going to say backward.

OLIVER

Maybe so. Now, I want to understand your family situation a little better.

MRS. ERICKSON

It's all there.

OLIVER

Yes. Your husband. He's an office manager?

MRS. ERICKSON

He works very hard. And he's very kind and loving.

OLIVER

And he stays healthy.

MRS. ERICKSON

(Slight hesitation)

He takes good care of himself. He's fine. He loves me so much.

OLIVER

And your children?

MRS. ERICKSON

He loves them, too.

OLIVER

Fifteen and thirteen. . .

MRS. ERICKSON

That was two years ago. Jody is a senior now. He has a little trouble with his math. I think it's my fault. He gets so distracted when I have my attacks.

OLIVER

And your daughter?

MRS. ERICKSON

Lizzy.

OLIVER

You say she sometimes helps you when you're stuck in bed.

MRS. ERICKSON

She brings cold compresses for my forehead.

OLIVER

And the other times?

MRS. ERICKSON

She stays with school friends. She's very popular.

OLIVER

What does your son do?

MRS. ERICKSON

He's still in school.

OLIVER

I mean when you have your attacks. I take it he doesn't bring you cold compresses.

MRS. ERICKSON

He's a boy. He doesn't think about things like that. Besides, he's not home that much.

OLIVER

Where is he?

MRS. ERICKSON.

Out with his friends, I suppose. I mean, he can't bring them home when I'm. . .

OLIVER

What about the other times - when you're well?

MRS. ERICKSON

Then I'm able to get things organized around the house before it happens again. And it always does. It's so hard on Will.

OLIVER

Your husband.

MRS. ERICKSON

He takes it so well.

OLIVER

I imagine all this makes your conjugal life difficult, too

MRS. ERICKSON

It makes it non-existent. It doesn't matter.