

“The Old & The Restless”

By Gerard Dunning

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With thanks to the many Directors and Actors for their guidance.

The Old & The Restless tells the story of a group of retirement home residents who refuse to settle quietly into routine. Tired of bingo, bed checks, and the stern rule of Matron Biggs, they hatch a plan to escape.

What begins as idle chatter soon snowballs into a full-blown conspiracy, fuelled by clashing personalities, comic mishaps, and a growing sense of rebellion. As the group bickers, blunders, and stumbles through their preparations, they find strength in one another, and a reminder that mischief, friendship, and the desire for freedom don't fade with age.

This one-act comedy blends slapstick with heart, delivering laughs and warmth in equal measure.

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The Old & The Restless

A one-act play in five scenes

Setting

The communal lounge of a retirement home – The Sunnyvale Retirement Village. The room is practical but dated, with mismatched armchairs, a sagging sofa, and a television that always seems a little too loud. A pot plant droops in the corner, and a faded noticeboard displays weekly schedules, bingo night, sing-alongs, and physiotherapy sessions.

Characters

Arthur: Hard of hearing, refuses to wear his hearing aid, constantly mishears conversations.

Mabel: Reliant on her colostomy bag, frank and unashamed about it.

Stanley: Grumpy, contrarian, always takes the opposite view.

Doris: Drifts in and out of sleep (hypersomnia), often dozing mid-conversation.

Reginald: Ex-actor, plays everything with grandiose drama, insists on costumes/props.

Elsie: Anxious, never wants to be too far from a toilet.

Matron Biggs: Strict, overbearing, focused on routine, oblivious to the “plot.”

Resident & Orderly: Optional small roles in the final scene

Author's Note

At first glance, *The Old & The Restless* may appear to be just another comedy about ageing. But beneath the laughter, this play is a celebration of resilience, camaraderie, and the indomitable spirit that refuses to fade with time.

Set within the confines of a retirement home, we meet a band of eccentric residents who, in their own ways, feel imprisoned by routine, infirmity, and the stern watch of Matron Biggs. Each character carries quirks and challenges, some comic, some poignant, but together they spark a daring plan to “escape.” What begins as idle chatter over bingo becomes a collective mission, reminding us that rebellion, mischief, and the yearning for freedom are not confined to youth.

The humour of the piece lies not in mocking age, but in celebrating it; its stubbornness, its honesty, its eccentricities. The residents’ frustrations, their frankness, their sheer will to outwit the rules of their world invite us to laugh, to empathise, and perhaps to reflect on what it means to live fully at any stage of life.

The Old & The Restless is a one-act play designed for brisk scene changes and ensemble energy. It thrives on character-driven comedy, slapstick, and the warmth of shared humanity. It is both light-hearted and quietly defiant, offering audiences laughter laced with the truth that freedom is not about age, but about spirit.

Scene 1 – Bingo in the Prison Camp

(The common room of Sunnyvale Retirement Village. A table with bingo cage sits at centre. Plastic chairs are scattered. Fluorescent lights hum faintly. A faint smell of disinfectant seems to hang in the air. The residents are shuffling in. Matron Biggs stands officiously with a clipboard. Arthur fiddles with a chair. Mabel carries her colostomy bag and plonks herself down. Doris drifts into a chair and dozes instantly. Elsie hovers near the door, glancing nervously. Reginald adjusts a scarf, already striking poses. Stanley mutters to himself)

Matron Biggs: *(raising her voice as though addressing unruly children)*

Right. Bingo. Eyes down, cards ready, no dawdling. We'll keep this orderly if it kills me.

Arthur: *(cupping his ear)*

Kills you? Someone's dying?

Mabel: *(shorts)*

Not yet, Arthur, though I wouldn't mind if she choked on her bloody clipboard.

Matron Biggs:

Mabel! Language.

Mabel:

What? I said clipboard. You should hear me when I'm really annoyed.

Stanley: *(sinking into chair, grumbling)*

Here we go again. State-sponsored torture. Death by bingo.

Reginald: *(throwing arm wide)*

Nonsense! Every performance, no matter how trivial, is an opportunity for art. Bingo is but life's lottery upon the stage!

Mabel:

Christ, Reginald, it's a game with plastic balls, not bloody Hamlet.

Elsie: *(urgently, to Matron)*

Can I sit near the door? Just in case. Closest seat possible. Emergencies, you know.

Matron Biggs: *(sighs, points her to the nearest chair)*

Fine, Elsie. But for heaven's sake, stay in one place tonight.

Doris: *(startles awake)*

Bingo? Oh... *(immediately snores again)*

Matron Biggs: *(calling numbers)*

Right then, eyes down, let's get this over with. First number... 22.

Mabel: *(brightly)*

Two little ducks! Quack, quack!

Stanley: *(groaning)*

Oh, for heaven's sake. They're *numbers*, not a barnyard roll call.

Doris: *(half-dozing, mutters)*

...quack, quack... *(falls back asleep)*

Matron Biggs: *(ignoring)*

Next up... 17.

Reginald: *(leaping to his feet, arms wide)*

Ah! Seventeen - Dancing Queen! I *was* one, once... in a burlesque show in Brighton, 1959. Sequins, feathers, the whole glittering spectacle! The critics said I had the legs of a Greek god.

Mabel: *(cackling)*

More like the knees of a broken shopping trolley, Reg.

Stanley: *(snapping)*

For pity's sake, it's just *seventeen*. One and seven. Get on with it!

Arthur: *(squinting, baffled)*

Brighton? Oh yes, lovely sandwiches at the pier. Ham, though it tasted suspiciously like tongue...

Elsie: *(half-giggling, half-worried)*

Oh my... burlesque? Do you... do you still have the costume?

Reginald: *(deadly serious)*

Naturally. A performer never parts with his plumage.

Matron Biggs:

Next number - 88.

Mabel: *(immediately, loud and shameless)*

Two fat ladies!

Stanley: *(suddenly perking up, chuckling)*

Ha! Best call in the whole bloody game.

Elsie: *(scandalised):*

Oh! That's *rude*!

Mabel: *(grinning, pointing at Elsie):*

Don't worry, love - you're safe. You're barely a fat sparrow.

Doris: *(half-asleep, mumbling)*

Two... fat... trams... zzzz...

Arthur: *(mishearing, baffled)*

Two flat batteries? Oh, I've got loads of those in my drawer.

Reginald: *(still in his burlesque fantasy, striking a pose)*

Two fat ladies? Darling, that was *my* signature finale! Boa in one hand, fan in the other... and oh, the *thunderous applause*!

Stanley: *(actually laughing now)*

See? Worth the ticket price just for that.

Mabel: *(snapping)*

For Christ's sake, Reginald, just shut up and mark your bloody card.

Elsie: *(still anxious)*

Where is the nearest loo? If we make a dash, its left, isn't it?

Mabel: *(rolling her eyes)*

Yes, Elsie, left. Straight through freedom, past the pearly gates, and you can piss on Saint Peter's slippers while you're at it.

Arthur: *(cheerful, mishearing "loo")*

Twenty-two!

Matron Biggs: *(huffs)*

I haven't called that yet!

Arthur:

Oh. Thought I heard it. Two little ducks escape the zoo, wasn't it?

(Beat. Everyone stops. They look at Arthur. Silence)

Mabel: *(leaning forward, slyly)*

Escape, eh?

Reginald: *(slowly rising, eyes gleaming)*

Yes... escape. The very word quickens the blood.

Stanley: *(scoffing)*

Don't be ridiculous. We can't even escape constipation.

Mabel: *(sharp)*

Speak for yourself. Mine works like a bloody charm. Bag's never dry.

(Awkward pause. Arthur grins vacantly. Reginald clasps his chest in mock tragedy)

Reginald:

We are prisoners, my comrades! Caged in polyester chairs, tormented by endless balls! We must...

Mabel: *(interrupts)*

Cut the theatrics, luv. But... he's right. This place is a bloody prison. And I don't do prisons.

Stanley:

You couldn't escape a paper bag, Mabel.

Mabel:

I've escaped three husbands, Stanley. You want to test me?

(She glares. He looks away, muttering.)

Arthur: *(slowly)*

Prison?

Elsie:

More like a toilet block with beds.

Doris: *(stirs, mutters)*

Mmm... break out... *(snores again)*

(The others glance at each other. A spark of conspiracy ignites. Matron looks up, suspicious.)

Matron Biggs:

What's going on here?

Mabel:

Nothing. Just trying not to die of boredom, Matron. Want to join?

(Matron narrows eyes but continues calling numbers. The others exchange furtive looks. The seed is planted. Lights fade)

Scene 2 – The Grumbler’s Council

(The common room, later that evening. A lamp dimly lit. The group has gathered secretly, whispering. Arthur fiddles with a hearing aid but doesn’t switch it on. Mabel sits centre, arms folded. Stanley lurks grumbling. Elsie hovers near door. Doris nods off in chair. Reginald paces like a general.)

Mabel:

Right, we’re not bloody children. If we’re going to do this, we need a plan.

Arthur:

Who’s got flan?

Mabel:

Not flan, Arthur. A bloody plan. We’re busting out.

Stanley: *(snorts)*

Busting out? You can barely bust out of your chair.

Mabel:

Watch it, Stanley. I’ve still got enough left in me to put you flat on your arse.

Reginald:

Friends, comrades... think not of decrepitude, but destiny! Tonight, we chart the path to freedom!

Mabel: *(rolling eyes)*

Oh Christ, here he goes.

Elsie:

Can we make sure we chart it past the toilets? Every corridor. I’ve mapped them, look.

(She produces a crude “toilet map.” The others stare at it in disbelief)

Mabel:

It looks like a treasure map drawn by someone who’s been into the Pimm’s.

Arthur: *(nodding)*

Ah yes, I do remember her. Lovely woman, Gladys Simms. Terrible breath though.

Stanley: *(ignoring Arthur)*

We don't need maps. We need common sense. And none of you have it.

Mabel:

You've got plenty of misery though. Maybe we can weaponize that.

Reginald:

Yes! Stanley, the dour sentinel, striking terror into our foes with his eternal scowl!

Stanley:

Get stuffed.

(Doris suddenly snores loudly. Everyone looks)

Mabel:

Wake her up. She's meant to be part of this.

Reginald: *(softly dramatic, shaking her)*

Arise, fair maiden, the hour of destiny calls!

Doris: *(startles awake)*

I didn't eat your biscuits! *(pauses, confused)* What?

Arthur: *(perking up)*

Biscuits? Oh yes please! Proper shortbread, though - not that cheap stuff. My Margaret used to make it... terrible woman, mind, but the biscuits were decent.

Mabel:

Bloody hell. This is like herding cats. Senile cats with bad hips, and you Arthur *(turns to him)*, who'd shag a custard cream if it sat still long enough.

Stanley: *(tired)*

You're all mad. There's no escape. It's impossible.

Mabel:

You sound like my first husband. He said I'd never leave him. Guess what? I left him. Twice.

(Beat. The others chuckle. Even Stanley cracks a smile)

Reginald:

We must rehearse! Tomorrow, four o'clock, exercise hour. We'll stage a run-through.

Mabel: *(agrees, with some doubt)*

Fine. But if anyone wets themselves, you're cleaning it up.

(Matron Biggs enters suddenly. The group freezes, guilty)

Matron Biggs:

What's going on here?

Mabel: *(quickly)*

Orgy. Want to join?

(Beat of stunned silence. Matron splutters)

Matron Biggs:

I—! You—! *(collects herself)* Lights out in ten minutes. Don't dawdle.

(She storms out. The group bursts into suppressed laughter. Lights fade)

Scene 3 – The Dress Rehearsal

(Corridor area. Reginald is “director.”)

Reginald:

Positions, everyone! Arthur, you’re lookout. Mabel, distraction. Doris, the decoy sleeper.
Elsie, supply runner. Stanley... scowl with purpose.

Stanley:

I’m always bloody scowling.

Mabel:

Yes, and you’re very good at it. Congratulations.

Reginald: *(ignoring)*

On my command... move!

(They shuffle awkwardly. Elsie halts)

Elsie:

Wait... how far’s the next loo?

Mabel:

It’s six feet away, woman. You’ll survive.

Elsie:

Six feet’s a long time when you’ve got a bladder like mine!

(They argue. Doris slumps, asleep. Reginald nearly trips on her. Arthur wanders the wrong way. Mabel gets her bag tubing caught on a chair. Chaos builds)

Stanley: *(grumbling)*

This is a bloody shambles! We'll be lucky if we don't all end up in traction before we even reach the front door.

Mabel: *(snapping)*

Oh, grow a pair, Stanley!

Stanley: *(offended)*

I beg your pardon?

Arthur: *(perking up, mishearing)*

What's that? Someone growing pears? Lovely this time of year, I'll take a punnet if the canteen's got them.

Mabel: *(rolling her eyes)*

Not pears, Arthur. Balls. Testicles. *(beat)* The very things Stanley's clearly missing.

Elsie: *(gasping)*

Mabel!

Mabel: *(shrugging, unapologetic)*

What? Someone's got to say it.

Stanley: *(spluttering)*

I've got plenty, thank you very much.

(The group chuckles despite themselves. Doris snores softly, then suddenly snorts awake mid-snore, startling everyone)

Doris: *(groggy)*

We'll need the frame. *(beat)* My walker... it rattles, but it's good for carrying things.

Mabel: *(grinning)*

Look who's finally joined the party.

Stanley: *(grudging)*

Hmph. She's got a point though. We could pile things on it.

Arthur: *(a beat behind, trying to keep up)*

Yes, yes... pile it on! Whatever it is, I'll catch up.

Mabel: *(snapping at him)*

You'll catch up when hell freezes, Arthur... and for God's sake, turn your bloody hearing aid on!

(Arthur puffs, shuffles forward with determination, fiddling with his hearing aid, then immediately trips over his own feet, muttering to himself silently as he regains balance. Doris drifts again, her chin drooping, then suddenly blurts out mid-doze)

Doris: *(murmuring)*

Eleven o'clock... best time... she's always in the office...

Elsie: *(perking up)*

She's right. The Matron does disappear around then. I've noticed.

Stanley:

Or maybe Doris is just talking in her sleep.

Mabel: *(snapping)*

Even half asleep she's more useful than you, Stanley.

(Stanley scowls deeper. Reginald seizes the moment, flourishing his cape dramatically.)

Reginald:

Enough of this petty squabbling! We must unite! We must plan with precision, with daring, with style!

Mabel: *(deadpan)*

Oh dear God, he's off again.

(Doris rouses one last time, eyes half-shut.)

Doris:

Just... don't make me push the walker too fast. I nod off.

(She promptly falls back asleep, head against her frame. The group chuckles again)

Elsie:

But... what if we're caught? The Matron won't just scold us... she'll make us do chair yoga again.

Stanley: *(smug)*

See? At least someone here has some sense.

Mabel: *(leaning forward, pouncing)*

Oh, don't you start, Stanley. You're a bloody stick in the mud.

Stanley: *(bristling)*

I'll have you know, I...

Mabel: *(cutting him off)*

...need some balls! We're planning an escape, not hosting a book club for Miserable Old Men.

(Arthur mutters again about pears. Reginald launches into a theatrical stance, addressing an imaginary audience.)

Reginald:

Picture it! The daring midnight flight of the forgotten! The world holding its breath as six noble souls defy captivity!

Mabel: *(under her breath)*

Noble souls my arse.

(Everyone groans)

(Matron Biggs appears at the end of the hall. Everyone freezes absurdly: Reginald mid-flourish, Doris collapsed, Mabel bent double tugging at her bag, Arthur saluting nothing)

Matron Biggs:

What... are... you... doing?

Stanley:

Fire drill.

Arthur:

Fry grill? Bacon?

(Matron shakes her head, mutters about “lunatics,” and leaves. The group collapses in relief)

Mabel:

Well... that was a cluster-fuck!

Doris: *(suddenly waking)*

We'll do it tomorrow!

(Everyone stares. Slowly, they nod. Lights fade)

Scene 4 – Cracks and Conspiracies

(Common room, late evening. Dim lighting. The group huddles, voices hushed. Stanley sits arms-crossed, glaring. Arthur fiddles with his hearing aid but doesn't turn it on. Doris is half-asleep. Elsie wrings her hands. Reginald is seated like a king. Mabel is centre, restless, cigarette in hand though unlit)

Stanley:

It's no good. We're fooling ourselves. We'll never get out of here.

Mabel:

Oh Christ, Stanley, you sound like my bloody ex-husband. Miserable, flatulent, and always telling me what I can't do.

Stanley:

I'm not flatulent!

Arthur:

Flatulent? *(stares at Stanley)*

Stanley: *(defensive)*

Oh, you can hear that ok!

(Mabel groans. Elsie snorts nervously, then clutches her side)

Elsie:

Don't make me laugh, I'll... oh dear... I'm going to pee!

Mabel:

Its two doors down, love. You'll make it. Unless you don't. In which case, well... best sit on Stanley's lap.

Stanley:

Don't you dare!

Mabel:

Relax, I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

(Elsie stifles a giggle, then frowns at her knees)

Reginald: *(firm, projecting)*

You must not lose hope! Heroes always escape their confines. Think of Steve McQueen, the cooler king, bouncing that baseball against the wall...

Mabel:

More like bouncing his balls, the way you go on.

Reginald: *(dignified)*

I was speaking metaphorically.

Mabel:

I don't care what you were speaking... you're bloody exhausting.

(Doris suddenly mutters in her sleep)

Doris:

Not the pigeons... they've all got hats...

(Everyone pauses, watching her)

Arthur:

Pigeons?

Mabel:

She's asleep, you daft sod.

(Mabel shakes her head, chuckling despite herself)

Stanley:

This is ridiculous. We're old, half-useless, and she's *(points at Doris)* not even awake!

Mabel:

And yet here you are. Grumping along like the rest of us. Why? If you don't give a toss, bugger off.

Stanley:

Because someone has to inject sense into this asylum!

Mabel:

Sense? You've got the personality of a wet sponge, Stanley. Always "no, no, no." Never "yes." You'd say no to a free pint, no to sex, no to bloody freedom itself.

Stanley:

Because someone has to think ahead! We'll break hips before we break out.

Mabel:

I've already broken one hip. Didn't kill me.

(Tense silence. Elsie fidgets. Reginald leans in, solemn)

Reginald:

We each have our scars. I was cheated of my final bow. The critics never saw my Lear, my Hamlet, my...

Mabel:

We're not your bloody audience, Reg.

Reginald: *(ignoring)*

I must redeem my art with this final act!

Stanley:

You're all delusional.

(Doris suddenly jerks awake)

Doris:

Where are we? Are we there yet?

Mabel: *(laughs, then suddenly turns serious)*

Listen. I don't want to rot in here. I don't want my last years to be porridge at eight, bingo at three, Matron breathing down my neck. I want to walk outside one last time. Smell real air.

Swear at real people. Not just you lot.

(Beat. Even Stanley softens slightly. Elsie nods, eyes wet)

Elsie:

I don't want to die in a toilet. *(beat)* Well, unless it's a really nice one.

Arthur:

Toilet? Oh, I went an hour ago, thank you.

(They chuckle. Reginald places a hand to his heart, standing)

Reginald: *(with great bravado)*

Then tomorrow night... our curtain rises. Our great escape!

(They all look to Stanley. He scowls, but less fiercely)

Stanley: *(eventually resign)*

You lot should come with a health warning! *(beat)* ... But maybe... ah... ok. I'm in

(A rare smile. Mabel grins back, triumphant. Suddenly, Matron Biggs barges in with a clipboard)

Matron Biggs:

What's this? Conspiring after lights out? I warned you lot about mischief. Routine keeps you alive! Structure, safety, order... without it, you'd all collapse.

Mabel:

I'd rather collapse in a pub.

(Matron gasps, flustered)

Matron Biggs:

Ungrateful rabble! Tomorrow we'll double your chair yoga! See how you like that.

(She storms out. Silence hangs. Then, slowly, Mabel smirks. One by one, the others grin too. Even Stanley chuckles. The group feels united for the first time)

Reginald:

Then it's settled. Tomorrow... we fly.

(Blackout)

Scene 5 – The Great Escape (Sort Of)

(Corridor leading to exit. Evening. The group gathers. Each has some absurd “gear”: Reginald with a blanket-cape, Mabel carrying her bag defiantly, Arthur with binoculars backwards, Elsie clutching her toilet map, Doris draped in a shawl with her walker, half-asleep, Stanley wearing a sensible jumper and carrying a good book)

Reginald:

Comrades, destiny awaits! Tonight, we shall be legends!

Mabel:

Shut up, Reg. You’ll wake the dead.

(They creep forward. Elsie halts immediately)

Elsie:

How far is it to the next toilet?

Mabel:

Two doors down. You’ll make it.

Elsie:

But what if someone’s in there?

Mabel:

Then piss on Stanley’s walker.

Stanley:

Don’t you dare!

(They shuffle on. Doris suddenly collapses mid-step, snoring loudly. Reginald and Arthur try to lift her but end up tangling themselves)

Reginald: *(to Arthur)*

Lift her legs!

Arthur: *(misunderstanding the command)*

Pigs?

Reginald:

Legs, man! LEGS!

(They drag Doris along awkwardly. Mabel follows, muttering curses, bag tubing catching on every chair)

Mabel:

Bloody thing... get off me! It's like wrestling an octopus with a grudge.

(Suddenly, a shadow looms. Another resident wanders in, confused, muttering. The group freezes)

Resident:

Anyone seen my teeth?

(Pause. Then Mabel whispers loudly)

Mabel:

Check Stanley's mouth. He's been biting people all week.

Stanley:

Oh sod off!

(The resident wanders away. Group exhales, relieved. They continue. At the exit, Matron Biggs suddenly appears, blocking the way)

Matron Biggs:

Stop! Back to bed! Routine saves lives! You'll all injure yourselves...

(Arthur panics and presses the wall alarm button. A deafening SIREN erupts. Red lights flash. Chaos)

Mabel:

Oh, bloody brilliant. Nice one, Arthur!

*(A laundry trolley suddenly careens down the hall, pushed by a panicked **Orderly**. It crashes through, sending the group stumbling forward. Elsie clutches her map, screaming about toilets. Doris snores through it all. Reginald flourishes his blanket-cape, crying "Freedom!" Mabel is dragged along, tubing bouncing behind her. Stanley's walker wheels spin wildly as he barrels forward)*

Matron Biggs:

Stop! STOP!

(But in the chaos, the group is swept right out the door. Sirens cut abruptly to silence. Outside sounds: night air, crickets, distant traffic. They stop, gasping, staring around)

Mabel:

... Bloody hell. We actually did it.

Stanley:

I don't believe it.

Arthur:

Biscuits?

Doris: *(waking suddenly)*

Are we there yet?

(They all laugh. Reginald raises his arms like a victorious general)

Reginald:

Ladies and gentlemen... we are free!

Mabel: *(dry, cutting sarcasm and a knowing wink to the absurdity of the group's situation)*

Free at last, eh? Brilliant... Arthur can't hear a bloody word of it, Stanley will argue it's the wrong kind of freedom, Doris'll be asleep before we get anywhere, Elsie's already looking for the nearest loo, and Reginald thinks he's won an Oscar.

But you know what? We're still standing... well, most of us... and that's worth celebrating. Pour me a bloody drink before my bag explodes!

(Curtain)