

THE OLD & THE RESTLESS

A one-act play in five scenes
by
Gerard Dunning

Copyright © 2025,
Gerard Dunning

Web: gerarddunning.com

PO Box 5093, Erina Fair
ERINA

NSW 2260

AUSTRALIA

Phone: (61) 412 304437

E-mail:
gerard@gerarddunning.com

Cast of Characters

<u>Arthur:</u>	Man, 65+ Hard of hearing, refuses to wear his hearing aid, constantly mishears conversations.
<u>Mabel:</u>	Woman, 60+ Reliant on her urinary catheter, frank and unashamed about it.
<u>Stanley:</u>	Man, 70+ Grumpy, contrarian, always takes the opposite view.
<u>Doris:</u>	Woman, 60+ Drifts in and out of sleep (hypersomnia), often dozing mid-conversation.
<u>Reginald:</u>	Man, 60+ Ex-actor, plays everything with grandiose drama, insists on costumes/props.
<u>Elsie:</u>	Woman, 60+ Anxious, never wants to be too far from a toilet.
<u>Biggs:</u>	Woman, 45+ Strict, overbearing, focused on routine, but still caring.
<u>Resident:</u>	Woman, 60+ Optional small role in the final scene
<u>Orderly:</u>	Man, 25-45 Optional small role in the final scene

Synopsis

The Old & The Restless tells the story of a group of nursing 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.

Scene

The communal lounge of a nursing home - The Sunnyvale Nursing Home. 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.

Time

The present.

Disclaimer

This play is a work of fiction. All characters, names, businesses, events, and situations portrayed are entirely fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, or to actual events or establishments, is purely coincidental.

Creative Commons License for "The Old & The Restless"

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Terms of Use

You must give appropriate credit to the author, Gerard Dunning, in all promotional materials, programs, and acknowledgments related to this play.

You must credit the author prominently in the performance credits (e.g., "Written by Gerard Dunning").

This play may not be used for commercial purposes without explicit permission from the author.

Notification of Performance

Any individual or organisation intending to perform this play must notify the author prior to the performance, providing the following details:

Production Company Name

Director's Name

Full Cast Names

Performance Dates

Performance Location (including venue and city/town)

ShareAlike

If you adapt, remix, or build upon this work, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

No Additional Restrictions

You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Contact

Please send performance details to: gerard@gerarddunning.com

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 nursing 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

SETTING: The common room of Sunnyvale Nursing Home. 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. Late Afternoon.

AT RISE: The residents are shuffling in. BIGGS stands officiously with a clipboard. ARTHUR fiddles with a chair. MABEL plonks herself down, adjusting her bag. 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.

BIGGS

Right! Before we begin bingo, we need to go over tomorrow's schedule. A busy day ahead, so do try to stay awake, conscious, or vaguely alive.

ARTHUR

(To Mabel, excited)

Did she say lemon biscuits?

MABEL

No, Arthur. Brain on, love.

BIGGS

At 10am: Chair yoga. Gentle stretching. Reginald – gentle.

MABEL

(Calling out)

You heard her, Matron wants everyone's legs staying low this time.

(BIGGS stiffens for a beat, her smile tightening by a millimetre. She pointedly turns a page on her clipboard with exaggerated care and tries to ignore the "Matron")

REGINALD

(With flair)

I cannot suppress art. The body speaks.

STANLEY

Your body nearly poked my eye out last time.

BIGGS

At 11am: Craft hour. And we are using glue sticks only. No glitter. We are still finding glitter in the laundry machines.

DORIS

(Softly, drifting)

So sparkly...

BIGGS

Then 1pm: Mindfulness with Trevor from physio. Silence. Stillness. No commentary... or snoring.

DORIS

I don't snore.

STANLEY

(Flat)

You absolutely snore.

BIGGS

At 3pm: Name That Tune. No interpretive numbers. No props. No capes Reginald!

REGINALD

A tragedy Matron. My fans will weep.

(BIGGS briefly looks to the ceiling as if asking for divine patience, then resumes, lips pursed into a razor-thin line)

STANLEY

They've already suffered enough.

BIGGS

Dinner is chicken casserole with... (Glances up at the room, brittle smile) ...sago pudding. Which I'm sure "Matron" would approve of. (Back to clipboard) If I were one.

STANLEY

Sago pudding?! That's torture. Geneva Convention stuff.

MABEL

Oh shut it, Stanley. Sago keeps you regular.

ELSIE

(Anxious, hand slightly raised)

Um... will all these activities be near the toilets?

BIGGS

It's a nursing home, Elsie. Everything's near the toilets.

ARTHUR

(To MABEL, delighted)

Did she say bowling?

MABEL

Sure, Arthur. We're all champions.

(BIGGS tries to continue. The residents mutter)

STANLEY

Matron's prison camp!

REGINALD

(Stage bow)

Matron Biggs – commander of souls and glue sticks.

BIGGS

(Defeated)

Why do you insist on calling me that?

MABEL

Because it winds you up. Keeps us entertained.

STANLEY

And you run this place like Colditz, with tea breaks.

ELSIE

(Whispers to Doris)

Colditz had more toilet access.

DORIS

(Dozes)

Mmm. Yoga.

BIGGS

(Looks heavenward, muttering)

You see what I deal with? You see?

(Forces smile)

Welcome to another lovely day at Sunnyvale Nursing Home.
(Under breath) God help me.

Right then – bingo. Actual bingo. Numbers, cards, daubers. A simple game, if we all behave like humans and not escaped zoo exhibits.

STANLEY

No promises.

BIGGS

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

(Snorts)

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

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 arms wide)

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

MABEL

Give it a rest, Reginald, it's a game with plastic balls, not flaming Hamlet.

ELSIE

(Urgently, to BIGGS)

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

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)*

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)

For crying out loud. They're numbers, not a barnyard roll
call.

DORIS

(Half-dozing, mutters)

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

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.

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.

BIGGS

Next number - 88.

MABEL

(Immediately, loud and shameless)

Two fat ladies!

STANLEY

(Suddenly perking up, chuckling)

Ha! Best call in the whole damn 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 damn 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!

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 Stan. My prunes work like a bloody charm. Keeps me moving smoother than your excuses, I can tell you that!

(Awkward pause. ARTHUR grins vacantly. REGINALD clasps his chest in mock tragedy)

REGINALD

Caged in polyester chairs, tormented by endless balls! Yes, my comrades - We are all prisoners here of our own device.

STANLEY

(Deadpan)

Oh brilliant... is that your Shakespeare again?

REGINALD

(Offended dignity)

No... The Eagles!

MABEL

(Interrupts)

Cut the theatrics, luv. But... he's right. This place is a 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)

DORIS

(Stirs, mutters)

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

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

BIGGS

What's going on here?

MABEL

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

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

Scene 2 - The Grumbler's Council

SETTING: The common room, later that evening. A lamp dimly lit.

AT RISE: 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 children. If we're going to do this, we need a plan.

ARTHUR

Who's got flan?

MABEL

Not flan, a plan Arthur - focus! 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.

REGINALD

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

STANLEY

Get stuffed.

ELSIE

I just need to know where the loos are at all times. I can't relax unless I've got an escape route.

MABEL

Escape route? Love, I haven't needed a toilet since my op. That's why I've got this.

(She lifts the catheter bag proudly)

ELSIE

You mean you... just... wherever?

MABEL

Whenever. It's freedom in a bag. You should try it - turns every seat into the ladies'.

ELSIE

(Disgusted and impressed at the same time)

That's... horrifying. And also... practical.

MABEL

Exactly. You worry about your loos. I carry mine with me.

(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.

(BIGGS enters suddenly. The group freezes, guilty)

BIGGS

What's going on here?

MABEL

(Quickly)

Orgy. Want to join?

(Beat of stunned silence. BIGGS splutters)

BIGGS

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

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

Scene 3 - The Dress Rehearsal

SETTING: Corridor area. Exercise hour, 4pm.

AT RISE: 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 before I glue it in place!

(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. 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? 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 real 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)

(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)

BIGGS

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

STANLEY

Fire drill.

ARTHUR

Fry grill? Bacon?

(BIGGS 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

SETTING: Common room, later that evening. Dim lighting.

AT RISE: 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 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..

(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, BIGGS barges in with a clipboard)

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.

BIGGS

(Gasps, flustered)

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 night... we fly.

(Blackout)

Scene 5 - The Great Escape (Sort Of)

SETTING: Corridor leading to exit. Late evening (11pm)

AT RISE: 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

(Pointing to the toilet, 2 doors down the corridor)

Oh for heaven's sake.

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

For the love of sanity... 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, BIGGS suddenly appears, blocking the way)

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, brilliant move, Arthur! Let's get the dead involved!

(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)

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 single 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!

(A long moment of triumphant silence. Then-)

BIGGS

(Offstage, calling)

All right, you lot! Fun's over!

(BIGGS marches out into the outdoor scene, utterly unfazed, holding a torch and a clipboard)

BIGGS

Honestly. Every Thursday like clockwork. You escape, you get to the car park, you breathe the fresh air, and then I herd you back in before someone sprains a hip.

MABEL

(Defiant)

One day we'll make it to the pub.

BIGGS

And one day I'll win Lotto. Until then - bedtime. Move it, rebels.

STANLEY

(To the others, grumbling)

Told you. Bloody routine.

BIGGS

Yes, and it keeps you alive. Come on - shuffle, shuffle.

(They shuffle back inside, defeated but spirited)

BIGGS

(To audience, with dry affection)

And there they go... The Old and the Restless. Unstoppable, unmanageable, and somehow still mine to wrangle.

(She gives a small laugh, shaking her head)

Right then - lights out, you rebellious lot.

(Lights Out. Curtain)