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On the Rebound

by

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On the Rebound

Characters

Will, retired, aged seventy-seven years

Tom, late sixties

Joan, late sixties

Time: The Present. An evening in Autumn.

Scene: The action throughout the drama takes place in an old, tired combined dining and sitting room of a 2-bedroom house in South London owned by Will, who bought it when he retired from his work as an Office Manager.

On the wall at URC is a rectangular metal framed window which looks out onto a garden . As it is autumn the window panes are lightly steamed with condensation. A shadow of a large tree frames the window where a limp open curtain hangs, barely touching the window sill.

Underneath and slightly DC of the window is a wooden table bearing a can of sausages, a teapot, a carton of milk and the remains of a small meal on a plate. There are two chairs L and R of the table.

R of and on the same wall as the window is a door leading into a kitchen. I

On the L wall is a framed print of a seaside scene. DL of the print is a wooden door which exits into the hall. The door has hooks holding coats, jumpers and cardigans.

DR and at an angle to the audience are an old armchair and small side table.

C is a small old settee

DCL is a television at an angle to the interior of the room; slightly L of which is a standard lamp with a tasseled shade. On the floor underneath the TV is a Sky TV monitor. The glow from the TV can be seen and the loud voice of Bradley Walsh, the compete of 'The Chase, followed by The voices of the the Chaser, Ann Hegarty and a contestant are heard.

As the scene opens Will, a slightly overweight seventy-seven-year-old, is sprawled on the settee with his head back. He wears a blue shirt underneath a grey pullover and crumpled grey trousers. He also wears slippers. He has an opened newspaper on his lap and in his hand the TV remote. He is snoring quietly. Beside him is a small pile of magazines and books. A walking stick rests against the settee.

Will suddenly awakes and abruptly sits up, scratching his tousled white haired head.

He stares at the TV screen and shakes his head.

Will: The Chase? I saw that yesterday. Bloody repeats.

He switches off TV with the remote and leaves it with the newspaper, its pages falling from the settee onto the floor.

Will: What's the time then? *(He struggles to stand with the aid of the stick and turns to look at the clock)* Six o'clock? I was away with the fairies for an hour. Tom's late.

He crosses to the table and picks up the can. He takes out a small sausage from it, which bends as he holds it up. L

Will: *(distastefully)* Look at it.

He quickly eats it and slightly grimaces.

He places the can on the table.

At that moment the door to the hall opens and Tom enters carrying a plastic bag of shopping. He notices Will chewing on the sausage.

Tom is shorter than Will but more active. He wears an open neck yellow shirt under a brown jumper, black trousers, which are a little short in the leg and brown shoes. His hair is closely groomed and salt and peppery brown. He makes an effort with his appearance.

Tom: I dunno, started without me 'ave you?

Will: What? *(he swallows)* No, left over from lunch. Tinned sausages. I'll never have them again. Disgusting little things.

Tom: 'ad a busy day then. *(He scans the room)* Busy keeping this room clean I see.

Will: *(gruffly)* You're late.

Tom: Traffic problems. I suppose you're 'ungry?

He places plastic bag on table

Will: Yes, I am.

Tom crosses to settee and tidies the newspaper, magazines and books. He places the remote underneath the TV. He turns to Will.

Tom: Fell asleep again, did ya?

Will: You would at my age.

Tom: Next month I'll be a Sept...septa

Will: *(interrupting)* Septuagenarian.

Tom: Yes, seventy, next month.

Will sits at the kitchen table

Will: Oh yes, of course you are, but I'm seventy-seven.

Tom: *(smiling)* Next month?

Will: *(irritably at first)* Don't be clever. Anyway, welcome to the queue.

Tom: What queue?

Will: The funeral queue.

Tom: *(He smiles)* You must be near the front of it then.

Will peers into the plastic bag.

Will: I thought I smelled something nice in here.

Tom crosses to table

Tom: I was going to buy sausages, but you must be glad I didn't.

Will: What did you buy, chips?

Tom: Yes, and Cornish pasties.

Will: The last time we had pasties they tasted like soap.

Tom: The bloke in the butchers said these were good. If you don't want one, just eat the chips, unless of course, you wanna rustle something else up yourself.

Will: No, no, I'll have the pasty.

He stands and struggles to the kitchen door.

Tom: Can you manage?

Will shakes his head and has a coughing fit.

Tom approaches the door to the kitchen.

Tom: Just go and sit down.

Tom exits

Will sniffs loudly and crosses and sits L at the table.

Will: (quietly to himself) He knows I don't like them.

Tom returns to the table with the plates and knives and forks. Tom starts sharing out the food, moves aside the remains of Will's lunch and sits R at table and soon they begin to eat.

Will: (unconvincingly) This pasty is much better. Spicy.

Tom: Good.

Will coughs

Will: Cor, it is spicy.

He coughs again and sniffs loudly

Tom: I'll get you some water.

Tom crosses to the door to the kitchen and exits.

Will gingerly eats

Tom enters from kitchen and hands Will a glass of water and sits at the table

Will: Thanks. Busy today then?

He drinks

Tom: So, so. Tidyin' up, sweepin' , pullin ' up weeds, ya know. I was pleased to get 'ome. In fact, I'm gettin' sick of the work, cleanin' up after the whole bloody neighbourhood.

Will: You used to like the work.

Tom: Well I suppose it's better than sittin' in the council offices shiftin' and filin' papers, like I used to, but I'm gettin' older Will. I feel the end of summers chills and by three o'clock I get tired, and what with looking after you as well.

Will leans back in his chair and looks up at the ceiling. He then smiles weakly at Tom.

Will: Thanks. (*sardonically*) I'm so very sorry.

Tom: I didn't mean to sound.... you know.

Will: I know. It's alright.

Will chokes on his food and drinks from the glass.

Tom: Are you sure you're okay? You should use that stick. You'll fall over and damage the other leg, if you're not careful.

Will turns to Tom.

Will: Where would you go?

Tom: Go?

Will shuffles to the table

Will: If you didn't have me to look after.

Tom: You know what I've in mind.

Will sits and picks at his food

Will: What, renting a little place by the sea? It would cost a fortune. You live here rent free.

Tom: Wait a minute, I pay my share of the electric, gas, council tax and I cook our meals. I also do the shoppin', washin' and gardenin' and I clean the place.

Will: Alright, alright. I used to help with the chores before I had problems with my leg.

Tom: No you didn't, not much anyway. Most of the time you watched me, slept or read those cheap paperbacks, which surprises me. You used to read classics.

Will smiles

Will: You're more of a snob than I am. I like to vary my reading material.

Tom: You vary your drinkin' too. You still drink too much.

Will: I've always been in control of my drinking.

Tom: In control of the bottles, you mean.

Tom stands and places his own food scraps into the plastic bag and picks up Will's lunch items.

Tom: 'ave ya finished?

Will: Yes.

Tom scrapes the remains of Will's meal into the plastic bag and crosses to the door to the kitchen with all the remains and items.

Will: When are you thinking of going?

Tom turns to Will

Tom: I dunno, when I've sorted ya out, probably.

Will: You don't have to worry about me.

He stands

Tom: Stick!

Will: Oh alright. *(He calls after Tom as he exits)* I reckon you should have married me, the way you fuss and carry on.

Tom laughs from the kitchen

Will reaches for his stick and grumpily crosses to the settee and falls into it. He picks up one of the books next to him and briefly skims the pages

Tom enters from the kitchen.

Tom: *(smiling)* You should keep your voice down. You'll 'ave the neighbours talkin'. Look I can't 'elp worryin' about ya. Always 'ave done. I wouldn't leave you in the lurch.

Will: I suppose you expect me to sell up and book myself into an old folks' home.

Tom: Now you're feelin' sorry for yourself.

He crosses to table and sits

Will: I couldn't, I'd lose my independence.

Tom: Well, you'd 'ave 'elp wouldn't ya?

Will: From people who are totally unknown to me.

Tom sighs noisily

Tom: I wouldn't think that would worry ya. D'ya want anyfing else to eat, or drink perhaps?

Will shakes his head

Tom: Did ya `ear me?

Will: (*firmly*) No!

Tom: No, ya don't want anything or, no ya didn't `ear me?

Will: I heard

Tom approaches Will and looks down at him with his hands on his hips.

Tom: You mentioned independence. Don't ya think you should be getting out a bit more?

Will: How can I with this leg?

Tom: You'll become a recluse Will. You're on the way already. Get yourself a Zimmer frame or one of those electric carts. You'll have more independence then, won't ya?

Will: I couldn't use a Zimmer frame; I'd feel older than I am and I couldn't afford a cart, whatever you call it.

Tom: You're seventy-seven for Gawd's sake. You'd meet more people of ya own age.

Will: I don't want to meet people of my age. They bore me.

Tom: Well, ya did say you've already joined the queue.

Will sighs noisily

Will: Look, let me know when you're ready to leave and I'll start advertising for somebody else.

Tom: I might not find what I'm lookin' for.

Will: (*annoyed*) Then shut up about it!

He reads

Tom: Alright, alright.

Tom: What's on the telly?

Will: (*sulkily*) Nothing! That's why I'm reading

Tom crosses to the TV and picks up the remote from beneath it. He sits in the armchair.

Will: I said there's nothing on.

Tom: I'll see for myself.

Will sighs heavily and continues reading

The glow from the TV screen is seen and the opening signature tune of 'EastEnders' is heard loudly.

Will glares at Tom

Tom switches channels, producing a mixture of sounds - adverts and short clips of programmes.

He switches off TV and replaces remote.

Tom: You're right. Makes ya wonder why we bovver 'avin' a TV. D'ya fancy poppin' down to the pub for a drink?

Will: Now you're being perverse.

Tom: *(scoffs)* Per -what?

Will: Oh never mind. You know I hardly ever go to the pub. I do my drinking here..

Tom: *(sarcastically)* Don't I know it.

Will: I don't drink as much as I used to.

Tom: *(continues sarcasm)* If I stay 'ere I shall end up doin' some ironin' won't I and I don't really want to, ya know what I mean?

Will: Creased shirts never worry me.

Tom: D'ya mind if I go?

Will: Please yourself.

Tom: Shall I give Joan a ring?

Will: Don't you dare.

Tom laughs

He crosses to the door, stops and turns to Will

Tom: Now that could be the answer to your problem. You should get Joan to move in with ya. She'd look after ya needs. Cleanin', cookin' and shoppin' I mean.

Will: No, I'd rather throw myself under a number eleven bus to end it all.

Tom: Why a number eleven?

Will: It stops at the local cemetery.

Tom laughs and Will falls back into the settee and also laughs.

Tom: You couldn't do worse than gettin' 'looked up with Joan.

Will grimaces

Will: I really don't think so.

Tom: Shall I go to the off licence and get some bottles of Guinness?

Will: Yes, why not.

Lights down and up on the same scene to denote a passing of time to the following morning

The tree can be seen through the window.

The door to the hall opens and Joan, a short, greying haired woman in her late sixties peers into the room from behind the door. She wears a floral dress to her calves, a baggy sweater and trainers on her feet. Around her throat she wears large glassy balls in a necklace. Her hair is short and neatly trimmed. A pair of spectacles on a gold chain hang from her neck.

Joan: Yoo, hoo!

She enters and closes the door.

Nobody at home. How unusual.

She looks about the room and opens the door to the kitchen at which point

Will shuffles into the room from the hall with the aid of his stick. He stops and looks across at her.

Will: What're you doing?

Joan gives an embarrassed laugh

Joan: I...I was just having a look, to make sure you've everything you need.

Will: You're a snooping old witch.

Joan chuckles

Joan: Yes, I've parked my broomstick on the front steps.

Will: What do you want?

Joan: I haven't seen you for ages, so I thought I'd pop in and say hello.

Will: Did Tom put you up to this?

Joan: Pardon?

Will: Never mind. Say hello and go, please.

Joan: You haven't been out, have you?

Will: No, I've spent some time on the loo, having consumed a dubious Cornish pasty last night.

Joan: Oh dear. Can I help you in any way?

Will: No thank you, I've been able to clean myself up. Now please leave.

Joan: I thought we might go for a walk, you and I.

Will: That's the last thing I'd want to do.

Will crosses to the settee and sits. Joan crosses to and sits in the armchair

Joan: We could go to the park.

Will: What, and play ball?

Joan chuckles

Joan: You need to get out.

Will: And you need to leave.

Joan: *(sulkily)* Oh please Will. Be civil to me.

Will: I want to read.

He picks up a book

Joan: Can I get you anything while I'm out?

Will: No.

He reads

Joan: A newspaper perhaps? Sweets? Ice cream?

Will: Just go. *(He suddenly realises and sits up and looks across at her)*
Where did you get a key?

Joan: The door was open.

Will: I'm talking about the front door.

Joan: I've had a key for some time. Tom gave me one.

Will: He didn't tell me.

Joan stands and crosses to Will

Joan: When you were in hospital he asked me to keep an eye on the place.

Will: And no doubt you've been snooping about in here ever since. God knows what you know about me.

Joan: *(teasingly)* You'd be surprised.

She picks up a book from the settee and scans through it.

Joan: I've noticed your taste in books has deteriorated. You being a learned man and that.

She drops the book on the settee

Will: Don't you start. Aren't we all learned?

Joan: Well, you're a cut above us in that department.

Will suddenly stands with the aid of his stick.

Will: I was an Office Manager not a man of letters. That's as far as I got in this life. This house was gifted to me.

Joan: You are a well respected man, Will.

Will: *(He scoffs)* Ha!

Joan: You are; very much so.

Will: I think you'd better go.

He approaches her

Joan backs away

Joan: What have I said? Goodness, you've changed so much since you damaged your leg.

Will: Why can't you all leave me alone, give me some peace?

Joan: Maybe it's because we cherish you.

Will: What? *(He laughs)* I'm not sure about you, but Tom just needs me to feather his new nest!

Joan: What's that supposed to mean?

Will: He's been going on about finding a place near the sea. He wants me to sell up and go with him.

Joan: Really? I don't think he would dream of taking advantage of you, you know.

Will: Perhaps not.

Joan: Talk to him.

Will: We discussed the situation last night.

Joan: And what conclusion did you reach?

Will: Well... *(suddenly)* why am I discussing this with you? Stop interfering.

Joan: *(calmly)* Interfering?

Will: And he had the audacity to suggest I hook up with you!

Joan: Me?

Will: Yes, you!

Joan smiles sweetly and then reacts annoyingly to Will's response.

Joan: Hook up? I'm not a bloody fish! Or a prostitute!

Will: *(distastefully)* Prostitute?

Joan: Another name for a hooker, that's what I meant.

Will: Of course, sorry, an unsavoury thing for me to say. Tom said if you moved in with me, you could do all my chores, including looking after me. I thought he'd discussed it with you.

Joan: No he hasn't and I'm not prepared to act as a bottle washer and your nurse, *(she chuckles)* and I'd definitely stop at wiping your bum!

Will: Don't worry, I wouldn't let you anywhere near my nether regions. I haven't reached that stage yet.

Joan: So what conclusion have you reached?

Will: Conclusion? Nothing has been concluded. I just want to know what you have in mind.

Joan: That's up to you. If you want me to look out for you, I wouldn't say look after you, I'd seriously consider it.

Will: I can't see Tom leaving.

Joan: Well, I can't answer that. Can I make you a cup of tea?

Will: No. Thanks.

Joan: I'd better go then.

Will: Yes.

He holds out his hand, which she shakes. They continue holding each other's hand.

Will: No hard feelings.

Joan: Certainly not.

Will: I'm not very good around women.

Joan: Really? You used to be quite charming.

Will chuckles

Will: Did I? I don't think so.

Joan: Yes, take it from me, you were.

Will: I didn't think you really existed. I know nothing about you.

Joan: Oh, thanks for that. If you must know, I live on my own.

Will: Yes, that's all I know.

Joan: And I've done so for fifteen years.

Will: And never married.

Joan: That's where you're wrong, but he left me. He suffered from depression, before it was recognised by the medical profession as a disease. He went off to live on his own, but one day he was found at the bottom of a cliff. Threw himself off.

Will: I had no idea. I suppose I've been too wound up in my little world and what's left of my future.

Will realises they are still holding each other's hand and he lightly removes his from hers.

Joan: Only you and my landlord know this.

Will: Your landlord?

Joan: Yes, I'd often confide in him. I thought a lot of him and hoped he might whisk me away on his white charger one day.

Will: He's probably a charger alright, charging you a high rent, no doubt.

Joan: No, he charges me fairly. We're good friends, at least I like to think we are.

Will: I apologise. Sometimes I must appear cynical.

Joan: *(teasingly)* Only sometimes?

Will: I suppose cynicism is a luxury in old age.

Joan: Old age? You're not old Will.

Will: What do they say about sarcasm?

Joan: No, no. Look, just enjoy life. Relax and do the things you want to do while you can.

Joan looks at him endearingly and smiles

Will: I'll do my best. Goodbye.

Joan: Oh?

Will: What's wrong?

Joan: You're dismissing me.

Joan smiles, turns to go, stops and turns to him.

Are you sure you don't want anything?

Will smiles and shakes his head

Will: No thanks. At the moment that is.

Joan: Fair enough. I'll keep in touch.

Will: As you wish.

Will holds up a hand in farewell

Joan smiles and crosses to the door to the hall.

Will: You may as well keep the key for now.

Joan smiles broadly

Joan: Sure?

Will: Of course.

Joan smiles again and exits through the hall door.

Will turns towards the settee and sighs

Will: In some way she's really nice. She'd probably make a good companion.

He shakes his head and smiles

Will: Oh come on, what're you talking about, silly old fool?

The lights go down and up again in order to denote a passing of time.