

The Retirement Party

A Black Comedy

By

Ian C. Black

The Retirement Party

Cast List

John Rodden – 65 (almost), he has worked for the local authority for most of his adult life

Wendy Rodden – 59, works for a small company's accounts department.

Julie Hoffmeier – mid 30's, daughter of John and Wendy. now married and living in Florida with her husband Max and their children Craig and Gemma.

Setting

The play is set in the 1990's, in the bedroom of John and Wendy Rodden's house, somewhere in the south of England. John and Wendy have been married for 35 years.

The play starts on the eve of John's 65th birthday.

The Retirement Party

SCENE 1 - The Bedroom

A large bedroom. There are two doors off, next to each other on Wendy's side of the room – one to the bathroom and the other to the landing. Next to the doors is a dressing table. There is a wardrobe to the side of John's bedside table. A window is on the adjacent wall to the wardrobe. A phone is located on John's bedside table, there is a table light on each bedside table.

Wendy is putting away some freshly ironed clothes into the wardrobe and tidying the room.

John comes out of the bathroom.

John: Anything I can do?

Wendy looks at him, she goes to him and touches his forehead.

Wendy: No temperature?! – You go downstairs out from under my feet and I'll be finished much quicker.

John: Will you be getting lunch then?

Wendy: Yes.

John: What do you want to do tomorrow?

Wendy: We haven't finished today yet.

John: I just thought we could do something, tomorrow. – Something special.

Wendy: What's so important about tomorrow?

John: You know.

Wendy: What?

John: Last official day at work.

Wendy: John, you finished work over a week ago.

John: Why?

Wendy: Because you had holiday owing.

John: And...

Wendy: Because it's your 65th Birthday.

John: You've remembered.

Wendy: Would you have let me forget? Dropping subtle hints.

The Retirement Party

- John:** Me, subtle, when?
- Wendy:** True, they weren't particularly subtle.
- John:** What've you got me?
- Wendy:** Wait and see.
- John:** Go on, give me a clue, please.
- Wendy:** You're worse than a kid. You'll have to wait 'til tomorrow. Now I must get on, you may be retiring, but I have to go to work next week and it's no use expecting you to suddenly become useful around the house, is it? Those sorts of miracles are rarer than lottery jackpot tickets and Hen's Teeth.

John sits on the bed, thoughtfully

- John:** That would be nice, wouldn't it?
- Wendy:** What would, a hen's tooth?
- John:** A lottery Jackpot. Set us up for the rest of our lives. Freedom to travel the world.
- Wendy:** You and your daydreaming. The only guarantee with the lottery is no ticket equals no win.
- John:** Sometimes it's worth a gamble.
- Wendy:** You know I don't like gambling, John.
- John:** The whole world is based on gambling... it's just they don't call it that.
- Wendy:** What are you on about?
- John:** Stock market, business, politics, war. – It's all gambling, but sometimes the odds are not so clear cut and the risk much greater.
- Wendy:** Well, you'll have to just dream of travel, while you wait for me to retire next year; if I last that long, of course.
- John:** Don't talk like that Wendy. You know it upsets me.
- Wendy:** Off you go downstairs and let me get on. I have to finish tidying up here and it must be nearly 1:00 already.

Wendy shepherds John out of the room.

John exits.

Wendy continues sorting and putting clothes away.

The Retirement Party

The phone rings. Wendy moves to answer it.

Hello! – Oh, hello Janet. Its Ok John's downstairs.

John (Off): Wendy, have you got the phone?

Wendy: Just a minute Janet.

Wendy goes to door of bedroom

Yes dear, I have got it. It's Anita; I'll try not to be too long.

Wendy returns to the phone and sits on John's side of the bed

Sorry about that. I didn't want John coming up and disturbing our conversation. So is everything set up for tomorrow? - All in the office know it's at Flanigan's Hotel? - We'll arrive for our 'quiet birthday dinner' at 7.30. - Yes, Julie, Max and the grandchildren should have arrived. Their plane was due to get in at about midday - I hope they won't be too jet lagged for the party. - Ok, see you tomorrow evening.

Wendy replaces the receiver and continues with putting away the clothes, and generally tidying the bedroom.

John (Off): Wendy, are you off the phone yet?

Wendy: Yes, why?

John (Off): Do you know where my magazine is?

Wendy: Where you left it!

John (Off): Where's that?

Wendy: On top of the fridge.

(Pause)

John (Off): Ok, got it.

The phone rings and Wendy answers it.

Wendy: Hello! - Hello darling. It's so nice to hear your voice. Where are you?
- How long ago did you get there?

John (Off): Wendy, have you got the phone?

Wendy: Just a minute darling.

Wendy goes to door of bedroom

Yes dear, I have got it. It's Pauline; I'll try not to be too long.

The Retirement Party

Wendy goes to John's side of the bed and sits, she picks up the receiver again.

Sorry about that darling. It was... that's right. Lucky he didn't answer the phone. - Yes it would have been a shock. (laughs) No, he doesn't suspect anything. - So are you ok? - I really have missed you darling. - I can't wait to see you either. - Well, you get to the hotel and have a rest, get your strength up for tomorrow evening. - We'll be there at about 7.30 for our 'quiet dinner'. It's going to be great to see his face - the shock when you walk in and throw your arms - no, don't wind him up too much, remember it's his birthday. - Ok, bye for now then darling and love to the Gemma & Craig and Max of course. I'll try and speak to you this evening if I can get a chance to use the phone for 5 minutes.

Wendy puts down the receiver and exits through the bedroom door.

Wendy (Off): So, what would you like for lunch dear?

BLACK-OUT.

The Retirement Party

Scene 2 - The Bedroom - That Evening

Bedroom – there are two cups one on each bedside table.

Wendy is in bed reading a magazine. John enters ready for bed. He walks around the bed and over to the window. He looks out.

John: Looks like it could be a frosty one tonight. Clear sky, no breeze. - Yes, it'll be cold tonight.

Wendy: Yes dear. Get into bed and you can be nice and warm.

John goes to the bed and gets in.

Just think, from next year we won't have any more of these cold English winters. Not with the option of Florida. Julie says it's just perfect at this time of year!

John: And there is India; South America; New Zealand; New York. - Well, maybe not New York in the winter. There are so many places we just have to see.

Wendy: Yes dear. I'm going to finish my cocoa and go to sleep. It has been such a tiring week. I'm exhausted.

John: What have you been doing to get you so tired?

Wendy: Nothing much dear. I may have had a few days off work, but there are things that still need doing here.

John: Like what?

Wendy: Oh, just housework and things. - You just don't realise how tiring housework can be. It's not a case of flicking around a duster you know.

John: Yes dear. As you keep saying. - What are we going to do tomorrow?

Wendy: Up to you, it's your birthday.

John: But it's the last day of your leave too.

Wendy: We could go to the garden centre. They have some lovely cherry trees in at the moment.

(Pause)

John: I must be wonderful to see miles of trees bearing fruit. Not the common fruit. Really exotic fruits...

Wendy: Or there's the new market, we could see what that is like.

The Retirement Party

John: Nuts!

Wendy: Sorry?

John: Nuts, growing on trees for miles. That would be great to see.

Wendy: Yes dear. We'll have to plan trips like that. But we'll need to budget carefully once I've retired as well. The money certainly won't grow on your trees.

John: Trees covered with money, ripe for the picking. That's where we want to go.

Wendy: Yes dear.

(Pause)

John: That reminds me. I've been thinking.

Wendy: Yes dear?!

John: I have decided to buy a lottery ticket tomorrow.

Wendy looks at John disapprovingly.

But Wendy, just think it could be us. All that money for us to enjoy.

Wendy: You know my opinion, on gambling.

John: It's not really gambling - and it is my birthday.

Wendy: (Softens) Well, it has to be someone, so I suppose it could be us.

John: Yes, and the fun we could have.

Wendy: We could set Julie and Max up comfortably for the rest of their lives.

John: Travelling across the world. Luxury hotels.

Wendy: Buy somewhere close to them in Florida and live there all year round.

John: All of those exciting places to see.

Wendy: Go to Disney with Gemma and Craig whenever they wanted.

John: Lots of interesting people to meet.

Wendy: Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck...

John: Who?

Wendy: At Disney, they have all the characters there, in real life.

The Retirement Party

John: They're just people dressed up Wendy.

Wendy: Yes, I know that dear. But it's still fun to go there and pretend.

John: Oh Wendy, will you never grow up.

Wendy: That's the joy of having grandchildren. You can still pretend and behave like them, and you get away with it.

John: Yes dear!

John and Wendy drink their cocoa

Wendy: Is your cocoa alright?

John: Fine thanks.

Wendy finishes her cocoa and lies down

Wendy: I'm going to sleep now dear. I'm very tired.

John: What no little cuddle or anything.

Wendy: Your birthday is tomorrow!

John: Oh. Ok, I'll read for a bit, if that's alright with you?

Wendy: Yes, but try not to fidget too much.

Wendy turns off her bedside light and turns her back to John. John reads and sniggers to himself. There is a short period of silence.

John laughs loudly

Wendy: What, who, what's going on? - I was almost off then.

John: Sorry dear, it's just this book is so funny.

Wendy: Well try and laugh quietly.

John: Yes dear, sorry.

Wendy lies still, John reads and laughs quietly. Wendy turns and turns.

John: Keep still dear, I can't read with all your bouncing about.

Wendy: Well, I can't get back to sleep; now you've woken me up.

John: Sorry dear. Shall we have a cup of tea then?

Wendy: Ok, if you like.

Wendy lies still and John continues to read.

The Retirement Party

I'm not getting it!

John: What?

Wendy: The tea!

John: Oh. I thought you were just about to go.

Wendy: No! If you want tea, you can get it; for a change.

John: Oh. I didn't realise you wanted me to go.

Wendy: It's the one thing you can't burn!

John: I'll go then, shall I?

Wendy: If you want tea... yes.

John: Do you want one?

Wendy: Only if you're having one.

John: My turn then?

Wendy: Yes!

John: Oh.

John gets out of bed slowly. puts on gown and goes off. Wendy sits up in bed.

John goes out

Wendy: (calling) And don't forget the biscuits.

Wendy picks up her magazine and starts flicking.

Look at these people, living a life of luxury. - Things were different when we were young. You were such a man of action. Mostly action of thought, but there was some physical stuff in there too. (she smiles) Some of the things we did back then, they make my toes curl now, just to think of them. - You were bold, fearless, a titan.

(Pause)

That's what I fell in love with - the John who fought for his beliefs, the one with fire in his belly and love in his heart. But the embers have gone out and the love is not the same. The fire of real attention; friendship; devotion; even caring, has to burn on both sides.

(Pause)

The Retirement Party

We were rebels of our time. But there was more, we had things to say, and we made them listen. Not like now. - No one listens anymore. It's all opinion, opinion, opinion.

(Pause)

That's the trouble with you. You don't listen, you never hear what I say, just what you wanted me to say. - How lucky I am, thank god you don't. How could I plan and scheme behind you back and get away with it if you did. - John, you are so unaware, I could get away with anything. - Lucky for you I still love you; it's all for you.

(Pause)

I hope it's not too much for you. - I didn't think. Surprise. Shock. You'll be alright. It'll be great; tomorrow evening.

Wendy yawns.

Where has he got to with that tea? Gone to India to pick it? I can't wait any longer. I can feel one of my heads coming on and that would not be good for tomorrow.

Wendy lies down in the bed. A few seconds later Wendy snores momentarily as John enters with a tray - two cups and a packet of biscuits.

John: You've gone back to sleep. After all the trouble I've been to, making tea and finding the biscuits. Not to worry, I'll drink yours as well.

John gets into bed and starts reading his book and shuffling in the bed.

We really need a new mattress, Wendy. This one is so lumpy, it's a wonder I ever get to sleep.

John takes a sip of his tea, then continues to read his book - sniggering.

(Pause)

(single bang off)

John is disturbed by a noise from outside the window.

What was that?

John puts down his book, gets out of bed, goes to the window. he looks out

Can't see anything. Must be those people at number 9. They never seem to sleep.

(Pause)

The Retirement Party

Here it comes. The frost has started to form. It's just those twinkling jewels in the darkness, not white yet. - But it's still early. It'll be a hard one tonight. It's a while since we've had a hard one isn't it Wendy.

(Pause)

The night is so beautiful. It reminds me of the time we spent in Spain. All those years ago - without the frost of course. That was such a wonderful holiday and we were so young. Whatever happened to our adventuring spirit? We never go on those holidays anymore.

(Pause)

Do you remember what we got up to in that olive grove? (laughs) Life was fun then, with no worries and nothing to stop us enjoying ourselves - and each other.

John wanders back to the bed and gets in. He sips his tea slowly as he speaks.

We had such wonderful times back then. Do you remember Florida, way before Julie lived there; before she was even possible. - If I remember rightly, you were so scared she may make an early appearance that I had to visit the chemist twice a week.

(Pause)

It's much easier now, bulk buying, internet deliveries. I had to travel so far on my bike to make sure I went to different chemists. I almost had a monthly route planned out when you agreed to go on the pill. - Lot of use that was. Three months of freedom; then Julie became part of our lives.

(Pause)

It was her that stopped our travels. Not that I blame her in any way. We were so proud of our little girl when she eventually made her way into the world. Two weeks late! That's Julie, always one to make an entrance and milk it for all its worth. - She was lovely when she was little. It's a shame she got so travel sick as a child and we missed out on wonderful foreign holidays.

John puts down cup and picks up a travel brochure from beside the bed. flicks through.

But now we can. We have the chance to travel the world and experience all these places we have dreamt about going to; but haven't. - It's down to us now. Nothing to stop us, we can go where and when we like once you retire - and I've got the whole of the year to plan our future adventures. It'll be so much fun.

The Retirement Party

(Pause)

John: I've got a good feeling about the future. - I will. I'll go and buy that lottery ticket tomorrow. - Everything's going so well for us, it'll probably be a winner, we'll be able to go anywhere and everywhere.

John puts brochure down and yawns

I think I'll sleep well now. I'll dream of the sun kissed beaches and far flung places we're going to visit. Good night dear.

John leans across and kisses Wendy on her head, then lies down in the bed.

Light Transition into Scene 3

The Retirement Party

Scene 3 - The Bedroom - early morning

John and Wendy are both asleep. The sun is streaming in through the curtains. John wakes.

John: (shudders) Oh! It's cold. The cold even seems to have got into the bed. Probably those frozen feet of yours.

John looks across to Wendy, but she does not respond.

Still asleep dear, with such a lovely day outside. Just look at that sunshine.

John gets out of bed and goes over to the window

You should see this. The sun is glistening off the frost. Everything's white. (chuckles) There's a bird stood on the bird bath, but its ice. No fun being a bird, must be cold out there. - Shame I wanted to get out into the garden this morning, to tidy up. Oh well, I'll just have to wait until later. Wendy, do you fancy going to the garden centre today? We could look at those cherry trees you were on about. - I must just spend a penny! - And look at the sheds.

John goes into the bathroom.

John (off): We really could do with a new one.

(pause)

Actually, while we're there we could go into the travel exhibition in the conference centre. That might give us some more ideas for next year. Some things I can be working on.

Sound of toilet flushing. John enters from the bathroom.

John: Got to get some planning underway. - You still asleep? I'll just get back in.

John gets back into bed, he looks at clock on bedside table

Didn't realise it was so early. These lighter mornings are confusing me. With that and the late frost, I am all uncoordinated. Must be this climate change we keep hearing about. Not that it's something we'll need to worry about. - I'll just read my book for a while. 'Til you wake up and make us some breakfast.

John takes his book from his bedside table.

He reads for a few seconds. Then tries to get comfortable. this process continues for a few phases – each time when he stops moving he looks over at Wendy to see if she has woken up. When he sees she has not he continues to read.

The Retirement Party

Then he noticeably moves his foot over to her and into her leg.

Oh, sorry dear. Didn't mean to kick you.

John looks over at Wendy expecting a response. Nothing comes so he continues to read. Then he bounces in the bed a bit to 'get comfortable'.

We really should think of getting a new mattress. This one is so lumpy. That's probably why I slept so badly last night.

Wendy still does not respond. John continues to read, as he does so he starts to hum 'happy birthday'.

Wendy still does not react

Wendy, would you like ME to make YOU a cup of tea on MY birthday? (smiles)

John waits for a second for a reaction, then looks over to Wendy.

John puts his book down and turns to Wendy. He leans closer to her

(softly) Wendy, what about my birthday treat – are you pretending to be asleep?

Wendy still does not react

John: Wendy! Wendy, are you awake? (Pause) Wendy, are you alright?

John moves closer to her and shakes her gently by the shoulder. No reaction.

Wendy, stop messing about.

John starts to shake Wendy more and more roughly.

Wendy! Wake up. It's a lovely morning. Open your eyes and see how gorgeous the sunshine is. - Wendy, please wake up.

John pulls the duvet back and is on his knees on the bed leaning over Wendy.

(almost shouting) Wendy! Why won't you wake up? Please wake up dear.

John shakes Wendy vigorously. He gets out of bed and goes to her side of the bed.

(screaming) Wendy! Oh god no! Wendy. You can't leave me!

John rushes back to his side of the bed and grabs the phone, dials and leans back to Wendy.

The Retirement Party

Ambulance! Quick! - Just get me an ambulance. I can't wake my wife up. - Number? - 555721! – It's my wife, I can't wake her up. - What? Yes, um, 5 Orchard Road, Seabrooke, Now just hurry!

John drops the phone handset on the Bed/floor and cuddles up to Wendy

You'll be alright. They'll be here soon. You can't leave me. - I won't let you leave me.

John starts to sob as he is speaking

I need you Wendy. I can't live without you. - Please don't leave me.
(getting louder with each repeat) Wendy! Wendy! WENDY!

Lights fade with each 'Wendy' - last one in Blackout.

The Retirement Party

Scene 4 Bedroom - two weeks later

John is standing looking out of the window. the room is quite tidy, bed made differently.

John: Wendy, it's so lovely today. The daffodils are beginning to come out. You'd love it, if only you could see it.

I'll plant a Cherry Tree right in the middle, where you always wanted it Wendy. Every year the blossom will bring you to life in your garden.

The garden you tended tirelessly, weeds wouldn't dare show their leaves. A monument to you. My job now though, it will never look as good, I'll do my best, won't be good enough; when was it. My best: your just acceptable.

John moves to the foot of the bed and sits. he drops his head in his hands and starts to sob.

Wendy - what am I going to do without you here? I'm lost in a sea of confusion, a world of strangers speaking a language I can't understand. Without you I can't go on - there's no point, no purpose - nothing left. Come back to me Wendy, please!

John howls with distress and continues sobbing.

Julie enters

Julie: Dad! Dad, are you alright?

John nods, head still in hands.

Julie goes over to him and sits, she puts her arm around him.

Julie: Dad. Don't get so upset.

John: But, I miss your mum so much.

Julie: Dad, you can't keep getting so upset. It will make you ill. Mum wouldn't want that, would she?

(Pause)

John: It was horrible, that morning. Your mum just lying there; cold, still. I held her, but she just wasn't there.

Julie: Yes Dad.

The Retirement Party

- John:** It was so good to have you here. A surprise! As much as the party was. I had no idea your mum had been planning it for me. It was just like her, always doing things for others. – All that planning wasted.
- Julie:** You couldn't have gone ahead with it?!
- John:** Of course not. But it's probably what she would have wanted us to do. – I've got it wrong again.
- Julie:** Dad, please don't blame yourself for everything. Mum wouldn't want that. You did what was right.
- John:** But I want her back. I need her.
- Julie:** But dad, you have just got to learn to cope. I'm here to help you. But I can't do that without you trying, you'll need to be strong.
- John:** You never were one to cover the pill with sugar, were you?
- Julie:** Well dad. You are going to have to be strong and change your way of life. Everything will be down to you now.

(Pause)

I'm happy to stay here for as long as you need me. Max and the children will be ok at home for a bit. - But it won't be easy, especially when mum comes home.

- John:** Do you really think she will come home again? She'll get better?
- Julie:** Mum will probably never be the same as she was. But you heard the doctor yesterday. She's showing signs of improvement.

(Pause)

- John:** Yes, she'll be better soon. Up and around, getting the lunch, doing the gardening, out with her friends; just like she ever did. Give it a few weeks. She's a tough old bird, she is.
- Julie:** No dad. Mum's not going to be up and about soon. It will be a long time – if ever.
- John:** We can celebrate her getting better with a party, like the one she had planned for me.
- Julie:** Dad! Mum will not be running around like a spring chicken when she gets home.
- John:** Well maybe not immediately she gets home. But that's why you have stayed on here, isn't it. It won't take her long. She always gets over sickness quickly, always has.

The Retirement Party

Julie: Dad. Will you stop this?! Mum's not going to get over this like she does a cold. This is big stuff. It'll take her a long time to recover from. (Beat) Don't you remember what the doctor said?

John: I didn't understand what she was on about. She said she had a semi-nasal accent, I wouldn't say she did, would you? And something about needing an oaty support, whatever one of those is! Why don't they just speak English?

Julie: (chuckles) Dad, you are so funny. It was O.T. support, that occupational therapy.

John: They're never expecting her to start work again already, are they?

Julie: No, it's to help her move and get about again.

John: I see – I think.

Julie: So that you don't have to wait on her hand and foot forever.

John looks up an expression on horror on his face.

John: How long does this oaty stuff take before it works?

Julie: It could take months, possibly years and she may never be fully able again.

John: But what about our plans? We have plans to travel the world starting next year, when your mum re-tires...

(Long pause)

Oh, Julie. She's not going to 'retire' is she? This is us now, isn't it? Your mum trying to get back to... about... disabled - and me the 'husband that does'.

Julie: Yes dad.

John: The cooking, the cleaning, caring for your mum. But I don't know how! You'll have to help me Julie!

Julie: Yes dad, of course. I've said I'll stay and help you. But you'll have to learn how to do all these things for yourself eventually. My family will want me back one day.

John: Oh my god!

John puts his hand to his mouth – he is going to be sick. he rushes out to the toilet –John exits

Julie: Are you alright dad?

The Retirement Party

sound of toilet flushing, John enters looking ill.

John: I can't do it.

Julie: Yes you can dad, it's not rocket science.

John: Where do I start?

Julie: We need to list all the jobs that need to be done, daily, weekly etc. Then we can plan how you'll get them done.

John: But, how?

Julie: I'll show you how to do each job. How the vacuum cleaner works, the washing machine, the iron, the cooker. All these exciting new things for you to find out about and use.

John: I've never been a gadget person.

Julie: Neither was mum, but she's still managed to use them.

John: But...

Julie: What?

John: Nothing.

Julie: Ok, let's get started.

John: How long have I got to learn all this?

Julie: It'll be several weeks before mum comes home at least. It depends on how quickly she improves.

John: Is it long enough?

Julie: If it's not, you'll have to continue to learn on the hoof.

John: I'm so glad you're here darling.

Julie: Yes dad!

BLACK-OUT.

The Retirement Party

Scene 5 Bedroom – many weeks later

Wendy is in bed, Propped up by pillows. She is leaning slightly to one side. There is a wheelchair near to the door of the room. John enters, he has a tray with 2 cups and a packet of biscuits

John: Here you are dear, a nice cup of tea and some biscuits.

Wendy: About time too. I thought you had got lost in the kitchen, again! Why have you brought the packet, you know I like a few biscuits on a plate.

John: Sorry dear. I forgot.

John places the tray on his side of the bed. He places his tea on the bedside table and holds out Wendy's cup to her.

Wendy: How many times John? That's my bad side.

John: Yes, sorry dear. I forgot.

John scurries to Wendy's side with her cup and hands it to her. He puts the biscuits on her bedside table.

Wendy: What have you been doing down there anyway? What about the cleaning downstairs. It may be out of my sight, but not my mind. And the bathroom, that needs a good going over. Have you stripped Julie's bed yet, it's a week since she went back.

John: Yes. I miss having her around.

Wendy: Doing the cleaning and cooking you mean.

John: No. We see Julie rarely enough. It was good to have her here.

Wendy: Would you like me to have a relapse, so you can get her to come back?

John: Wendy. Don't say things like that.

Wendy: What about the washing, have you started it yet?

John: There is a load twirling in the machine as we speak.

Wendy: Good. (Beat) It's time those windows were cleaned John.

John: Do you really think so dear.

Wendy: Yes John, I do! How long have I been home from hospital?

John: 4 weeks dear. - It's so nice to have you back.

The Retirement Party

Wendy: Yes. Well, I've been in this room for most of that 4 weeks and I know what needs doing in here.

John: OK dear. I'll see to it later. I never seem to have a chance to sit with you and chat. I'm busy cleaning, cooking and such like all day.

Wendy: Is it hard work?

John: Yes dear. I don't think you realise just how hard it is to keep this house up together and get the dinner and...

Wendy: You don't say. - And I thought it was just a case of "flicking around a duster".

John: Wendy. You have developed a very sarcastic tone since you came home, and I don't like it. - I think you need more to do. I'll have a chat with the oaty woman and see if you can get up and doing things.

Wendy: Oh no you don't. This may be the most boring thing I have ever done. But I'm not letting you off the hook that easily. - You're really lucky, some of the patients in the unit had lost their ability to speak.

John: I'm so glad you didn't Wendy. I'd miss chatting like this.

(Pause)

Wendy: I could do with a holiday when I'm properly up and about again.

John: That would be nice dear. But we will be tight for money now.

Wendy: Oh, is that my fault now!

John: That's not what I said.

Wendy: It sounded like it to me. My fault for having a stroke. My fault for not getting a pension. My fault you have to do the housework.

Wendy starts to cry, John goes and comforts her.

John: Of course it isn't, it's just we will need to be careful. - None of it's your fault.

Wendy regains her composure.

Wendy: I'm so pleased.

A Silence

What about that lottery ticket you said you were going to buy?

John: I did get one in the hospital shop; but we won't be winners.

The Retirement Party

- Wendy:** You never know; where is it?
- John:** In my trousers (Beat) that are twirling in the machine as we speak.
- Wendy:** What! John you total idiot.
- John:** But you were the one who told me to wash them “before they walked out on their own”.
- Wendy:** You stupid bastard, have you no common sense. You check the bloody pockets before washing clothes.
- John:** Wendy! What has got into you? I have never heard you talk like this before.
- Wendy:** That’s because you never listen.
- John:** Yes I do, we always talk these things over, share things. We decide things together.
- Wendy:** John. We talk, but you only hear what you say.
- John:** How can you say that? Give me an example.
- Wendy:** When we first met I was a bit of a radical. I wanted to change the world.
- John:** Yes, that’s what I liked about you.
- Wendy:** So why did you turn me into a suburbanite. I wanted to explore South America – you suggested a fortnight at Southend. I wanted to walk the Great Wall of China – you took me to Skegness. I wanted to join some international pressure groups like Amnesty and Greenpeace, to make a difference – we joined the National Trust.
- John:** This is all some years ago Wendy. I can’t remember what and why. But the National Trust is a good organisation.
- Wendy:** It’s not me! It’s you; boring!
- John:** Wendy! - Why haven’t you said this before?
- Wendy:** I have, you just haven’t been listening.
- John:** I have been recently, when we have been planning our future travels.
- Wendy:** No, you haven’t. I want to move to Florida and be close to Julie. But you have plans for us to travel the world.

John looks shocked, he bows his head.

The Retirement Party

John: I'm so sorry dear. I've only ever wanted to do what you want. I thought you wanted to travel as well. You always said you did. - You just said it!

Wendy: Many years ago, but not recently I haven't! That is what you heard, because you weren't listening. You make me so angry John.

Wendy moves and spills her tea over herself and the bed.

Wendy: Aaarrrgh! That tea's hot! It's all over the bed. John. Get the chair.

John leaps up and get the wheelchair. he moves it to the side of the bed and helps Wendy into the chair.

Wendy: Careful. I am not a sack of spuds.

John: Sorry dear. Can you push yourself across a little?

Wendy: Move out of the way and I'll do a riverdance. If I could push I'd have done so.

John: Yes dear, sorry dear.

Once Wendy is in the chair, John wheels her to the bathroom. - they both exit

Wendy (off): I'll need a clean nightie.

John (off): Yes dear, I'll get you one.

John re-enters. He moves towards the wardrobe.

Wendy (off): And get those wet bedclothes off the bed, before the mattress gets **Wendy**.

John stops in his tracks and goes to the bed. He starts to remove the bedclothes.

Wendy (off): Well! Where's that clean nightie? I'm freezing in here.

John stops pulling off the bedclothes and continues to the wardrobe. He looks for a nightie, goes to the wash basket and sorts through some clothes. He give the nighties the sniff test until he finds one that's ok. On the way back to the bathroom, he pulls the bedclothes off.

Wendy (off): About time to! Is this nightie clean?

John (off): Ye..Yes dear.

BLACK-OUT.

The Retirement Party

Scene 6 Bedroom – many weeks later

The wheelchair has gone. Boxes, clothes etc. clutter the floor and chairs.

Wendy is sat on the bed, using a laptop, she closes it.

Wendy gets off of the bed and starts moving slowly around the bed, with the aid of a stick.

John enters

John: Wendy, what are you doing?

Wendy: I can't sit around, you know that. I just want to get on with things.

John: Things? When I left you, you were surfing.

Wendy: How can I concentrate on that, when it looks like the tides gone out and left it's washed-up rubbish in here?

John: What?

Wendy: This place is not really very tidy, is it?

John: It looks ok to me. I dusted and hoovered in here last week, when you seeing the oaty woman.

Wendy: Well at least I can get out of the room now and don't have to live with this mess.

John: What mess?

Wendy: John. Can't you see? There are things in boxes, clothes that need washing; the floor needs a good cleaning. The windows are *still* dirty. (Beat) Need I go on?

John: No, but I'm sure you will. - I know I haven't done very well. You've told me enough times over the last few months. I have a system.

Wendy: What's that? Let the clothes find their own way to the machine, while you wait for the council to start bedroom refuse collections?

John: You're not easy. I am trying.

Wendy: Yes, very! But I'm up and about again now.

A silence

John: What about a nice cup of tea?

Wendy: If you're making, I'm drinking.

John exits

The Retirement Party

Wendy starts to look at things, moving dirty clothes with her stick.

Wendy: These clothes are disgusting and look at this mess over here. What's this? Why is there a pile of letters under here?

Wendy finds a number of unopened letters under some clothes and sits on the bed to open them.

John. You must pay this bill. Its 6 weeks old. We'll be cut off. (Beat) He's another one. John, what have you been doing? (Beat) Oh, what a lovely photo. Craig and Gemma are getting so big. It's so long since we saw them. (Beat) I must email them.

John enters. He is carrying a tray with 2 cups and a plate of biscuits.

John: You and your email. Not forgetting the WWW – Wendy's Wonderful World.

Wendy: Laugh if you must. But it's that computer that's kept me sane over the past few months. (Beat) Julie's house does look so lovely. We must visit when we can afford it, if we'll ever be able to. (Beat) Bastards!

John nearly drops the tray. He puts it down and looks at Wendy

John: What's wrong?

Wendy: I'm so annoyed. - No pension. Bast...

John: Yes dear, I know what you call them. But the doctor said you weren't to get excited or angry. Not in your condition.

Wendy: I'm not pregnant, John.

Silence. John puts Wendy's tea on her bedside table and sits with his. John munches a biscuit.

Wendy: I'm sorry John. I just get so annoyed.

John: I know dear. But you must try and keep calm.

Silence. John munches his biscuit and Wendy returns to the letters.

Wendy: Why have these not been opened? Some are weeks old.

John looks over to Wendy

John: What are they?

Wendy: Unopened letters. I found them under those clothes. God knows how long they've been "waiting for a twirl".

John returns attention to his biscuit

The Retirement Party

John: I'm sorry Wendy. I've had so much to do. I must have missed them. I'm just so tired these days.

Wendy: When did the postman start to deliver direct to our bedroom?

John: Anything interesting?

Wendy: Mostly bills and a letter from Julie, with some lovely pictures.

John goes to Wendy and takes photos. John returns to his seat and looks through them.

Wait a minute. What's this?

Wendy flicks through a document

It's our health insurance. Julie must have contacted them. They've paid out for my illness. - There is a cheque here...

John: I break out the Champagne?

Wendy: Six hundred pounds.

John: Ok, the sparkling water then.

John exits

Wendy: John. We'll be alright, won't we? As long as we have each other.

Wendy goes towards the door

John, to hell with it. Let's have the champagne anyway.

Sound off – breaking bottle and a bump

Wendy: John, you haven't broken the bubbly have you?

Wendy moves into the doorway

John, what are you doing down th.....(getting louder each time)
John! John! JOHN!

Lights fade with each 'John' - last one in Blackout.