

The Old Man and the Radio

by

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EXT. THE PARK - DAWN

RON, a small man in his 70s, steps out of his caretaker's hut and surveys the park. It's small but well kept, nestled between grey urban streets.

RON raises a pair of old headphones and puts them on, then presses play on a cassette walkman attached to his belt. MR BOJANGLES by NINA SIMONE starts playing faintly.

RON finishes tinkering with the engine of a rickety old lawnmower and closes the cover. He rips it into life and starts loudly mowing the grass.

As he works, the lawnmower roaring over the sound of the music, a woman walking her dog and buggy round the edge of the park sees him and gives a warm smile and wave.

RON smiles at her sheepishly and gets back to his mowing. The sound of the lawnmower subsides and the music swells and becomes non-diegetic. It plays through the following series of shots, which RON has his headphones on for.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) RON is crouching in a flower bed, pruning some plants as people pass him on the footpath, taking no notice.

B) RON is on a bench in his park, eating a sandwich and watching a game of football. A man sits next to him. RON gives him a tight-lipped smile and shuffles over to make space.

C) As the sun starts to set, RON is standing at the entrance to the park. He dusts himself down and looks, satisfied, over the park, now full of evening picnickers.

D) It's late evening and, as most people walk out of the park, RON walks in the opposite direction, towards his hut.

INT. THE HUT - EVENING

The music ends as RON presses eject on his walkman.

He pours himself a glass of whisky and sits at his desk. He pulls away a piece of cloth to reveal an old, cobbled-together two-way radio.

He grins to himself and flicks a switch. The radio lights up and we hear static. He fiddles with some dials and we hear indistinct voices through the static.

RON tuts and opens the back of the radio. He makes a small adjustment and the static clears up.

RADIO

But first here on Radio 4, it's  
time for The Archers.

RON

Oh, fuck me.

RON adjusts a dial and we return to static. He keeps turning  
and the static gives way to voices again.

AMERICAN POLICE RADIO 1

...Upper East Side. Suspect is  
heading south on Madison.

RON perks up.

AMERICAN POLICE RADIO 2

Copy that, two cycle officers are  
responding.

RON tuts and tunes the radio again. In the static we start to  
hear a voice.

ANNA

(distorted)

Hello?... need help...

RON frowns and starts to tune the radio more carefully.

ANNA (CONT'D)

...hear me? Please, my engine's  
stalled and I can't get it started.  
If anyone can hear me I need help  
as soon as possible. Hello?

RON warily connects a mic to his radio as ANNA talks. He has  
a soft voice and gentle South London accent.

RON

Hello? Er- copy?

ANNA

Oh my God! Hello? Who is that? Can  
you hear me?

RON

Er, yep, hi. I'm Ron.

ANNA

Oh thank God. Ron, my name's Anna,  
I need to ask you something. It  
might sound strange but I really  
need to know.

RON  
(suspicious)  
What?

ANNA  
OK, um... What year is it?

Beat.

RON  
Very funny.

ANNA  
No Ron, listen-

RON  
This your idea of a laugh is it?  
Bothering an old man with a prank  
call?

ANNA  
Please, Ron I'm not joking-

RON  
Well I don't have bloody Alzheimers  
I know it's 2021, so you can-

ANNA  
(voice cracking)  
Oh, fuck.

She starts crying. RON's face softens.

RON  
What are you doing?  
(pause, she cries)  
Well, err, fun's over. Goodnight.

ANNA  
(desperately)  
No don't go! Please! Please stay, I  
haven't talked to anyone in days,  
please. I just- fucking 2021! Fuck!

RON  
What... year should it be?

EXT. A PHONE BOX - EVENING

RON picks up the phone and dials 999.

OPERATOR (V.O.)  
You've reached the emergency  
services.

INT. THE HUT - EVENING

RON slumps down into his seat and picks up the mouthpiece.

RON  
Hello? Anna?

ANNA (V.O.)  
I'm here. What did they say?

RON  
They referred me to the silver  
line.

ANNA  
What's that?

RON  
(sighs)  
Helpline for lonely old people.

ANNA  
Oh.  
(pause)  
Thanks for trying.

RON  
Sure.

ANNA  
Will you stay with me?

Pause.

RON  
Sure.

ANNA  
Thanks.  
(pause)  
So what would you normally be doing  
now? If you weren't talking to me.

RON  
Err, finishing my drink. Scanning  
the radio.

ANNA  
So this is a normal night in for  
you?

RON  
(grumbling)  
No, I've barely touched my whisky.

She laughs, he looks startled.

ANNA  
Well I'm sorry.

RON  
(unsure)  
'salright.

He hesitates for a moment, then speaks gruffly.

RON (CONT'D)  
Um, are you some kind of astronaut  
then?

ANNA  
No, I play the piano.

RON  
Oh.

ANNA  
I actually teach at Guildhall. Will  
teach. You know what I mean.

RON  
(grunting)  
Yeah.  
(pause)  
You any good?

ANNA  
You know what they say, those who  
can't do...

He chuckles.

ANNA (CONT'D)  
I was brilliant.  
(pause)  
My daughter's meant to be going to  
Guildhall when she finishes school.  
We were so happy when she was  
accepted.

Pause.

RON  
Your daughter?

ANNA  
Yeah. Jessie.

RON  
Shit.

ANNA  
Yeah.  
(pause, then, softly)  
Do you have any family Ron? Anyone  
to talk to?

RON  
(shrugging)  
I listen to the radio. I listen to  
music.

ANNA  
What sort of music?

RON  
Just sad old git tunes.

ANNA  
Can I hear some?

CUT TO:

INT. THE HUT - EVENING

RON is flicking through a shelf of records, he picks one out with a smile, puts it on his record player, and sets it spinning. HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN by THE ANIMALS starts playing.

ANNA  
Oh!

RON  
I can put something else on.

ANNA  
No I like it it's, um... very  
dramatic.

RON  
It's too much.

ANNA  
No, I... I need distracting.

RON  
Right. Course.

He potters back to the radio and sits down.

ANNA  
What do you do, Ron?

RON  
Um, caretaker. At a park.

ANNA  
I didn't know parks needed caretakers.

RON  
Who says they do?

She laughs, he looks startled again, but his mouth twitches into a tiny smile. He's starting to remember he's funny.

ANNA  
How long have you been working there?

RON  
(sighs)  
Forever.

ANNA  
Wow.  
(beat)  
Imagine if they needed you.

RON chuckles, then sighs deeply.

RON  
I really hope you're real.

ANNA  
I bet you say that to all the girls.

He laughs. Pause.

RON  
How did you know? That you'd, um...

ANNA  
Everything looks different. I can't believe the planet's so green.

RON sighs. Pause.

ANNA (CONT'D)  
Is there anything you want to know? About the future.

RON thinks for a moment.





RON  
Don't be daft. Sorry you got stuck  
talking to an old man all night.

ANNA  
(chuckles)  
I never met an old man with such  
great taste in music.

RON  
Let me know when you do.

She laughs. He smiles.

RON (CONT'D)  
I should really thank you.

ANNA  
What for?

RON  
No-one's laughed at my jokes in a  
long time.

Pause.

ANNA  
(tenderly)  
Ron, you don't have to be alone.

RON  
(chuckles)  
Thank God for that.

ANNA  
I'm serious.

RON  
I know.

Pause.

ANNA  
Jessie's terrified of starting at  
Guildhall.

RON  
Your daughter?

ANNA  
Mmm. But if you heard her sing,  
Ron, she's... I wish I could tell  
her she'll be OK.

RON  
You can, can't you?

ANNA  
What?

RON  
She's in the future. You could, um,  
put a message in a safe, or bury  
it, or-

ANNA  
Ron, I can't land.

RON  
No I know, your engine's broken.  
But we do have telescopes, we're  
not that primitive. NASA or one of  
those lot will come and get you.

ANNA  
Only if they get here in the next  
hour.

Pause.

RON  
(perplexed)  
What?

ANNA  
(softly)  
I don't have much oxygen left.

Pause. RON stares blankly, stunned.

|               |                                   |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| ANNA (CONT'D) | RON                               |
| Gre-          | So you're just waiting to<br>die? |

ANNA (CONT'D)  
(chuckles weakly)  
Aren't we all?

RON  
Bollocks.

ANNA  
What?

RON

If we're all just waiting to die,  
why have a daughter at all? So she  
can join the queue?

ANNA

I know but... what can I do?

RON

Anything. Everything. What's wrong  
with your engine?

ANNA

I don't- um, I don't know, there's  
no power cell reading at all on my  
dashboard.

RON

OK, a flat battery. I suppose  
there's no-one to ask for a jump-  
start up there.

ANNA

Well actually...

RON

What?

ANNA

(sighs)

I could use the cabin's power.  
There's a different cell for the  
dashboard, the radio, all of that,  
but...

RON

What?

ANNA

I'd have to leave the ship to  
rewire it.

RON

Right?

ANNA

And I'd lose a lot of oxygen.

RON

Oh.

ANNA

Almost all of it, probably.

RON

Oh.

ANNA

That's why I was radioing for help.

(pause)

But if it is just the power cell...

RON

You could jump-start the ship...

ANNA

And get back to earth.

RON

What about your oxygen?

Pause. Anna sighs.

ANNA

What's the point in waiting? I need  
to leave that message for Jessie.

(pause)

I'm going.

We hear movement over the radio. Over the following lines,  
ANNA's voice is distant.

RON

OK. Right. Good! Um, where?

ANNA

Outside. To check the power cell.  
If that's the only damage, I'll be  
down there in time to finish that  
whisky with you. Speak soon!

We hear the hiss of an airlock.

RON

Good luck!

RON sits completely still, watching the radio. The record  
crackle rises as he stares. It grows until it fills the room.  
Suddenly it's broken by another airlock hiss.

RON (CONT'D)

Anna?

ANNA

It's just the power cell.

RON freezes.

ANNA (CONT'D)

No visible damage, just no power.  
It's got to be the power cell.

RON

Yes! That's- I mean, fantastic!

ANNA

I lost a lot of oxygen through the  
airlock though.

RON

You'd better hurry up then.

There's a loud click.

ANNA

OK I've rewired this end, I need to  
go and run the remote feed to the  
engine. If this works it'll drain  
the radio so... hopefully this'll  
be the last you hear from me.

RON

See you on earth.

ANNA

Thank you Ron.

RON

Go on, hurry up!

ANNA

OK.

We hear some shuffling, then another airlock hiss. RON sits  
still, watching the radio. Light creeps in through his window  
as dawn starts to break. Eventually, he leans in towards his  
microphone.

RON

Anna?

(starting to smile)

Anna?

We hear an airlock hiss, RON's smile drops.

ANNA

Ron?

RON

Fuck.

ANNA  
It didn't work.

RON  
You can try again can't you?

ANNA  
I don't know what I can do differently.

RON  
It's worth a try.

ANNA  
(heavy sigh)  
Yeah. Just a second.

RON  
I thought you didn't have much time.

ANNA  
I know just... let me catch my breath.

RON  
Anna you need to hurry.

When ANNA speaks her words are slightly mumbled. From this point on, her words get more and more slurred.

ANNA  
Just closing my eyes for a second.

RON  
No, Anna listen, stay awake. Just try again, try one more time. Anna! Wake up!

ANNA  
What? Ron, why are you shouting?

RON  
Because you're going to die!

ANNA  
It's OK Ron. We already knew that.

RON freezes for a moment, staring at the radio. He snaps out of it, scrabbles around his desk and picks up pen and paper.

RON  
OK, Anna? Anna!

ANNA  
What?

RON  
What's your daughter's name Anna?

ANNA  
Jessie.

RON  
No Anna I need her full name. And her birthday.

ANNA  
Jessica. 31st of March.

RON  
No I- what year was she-

ANNA  
She sings amazingly. Better than I ever could've taught her...

RON  
Anna-

ANNA  
...how do you teach someone to make people cry with just a melody?

RON  
(shouting)  
Anna!

ANNA  
Hm?

RON  
What's Jessie's surname?

ANNA  
Garcia.

RON  
And what year was she born?

ANNA  
2517.

RON scribbles down "JESSICA GARCIA, 31/03/2517, GUILDHALL" and slumps back in his chair, letting out a slow, rattling breath.



ANNA (CONT'D)

Look at all those stars Ron. Aren't they amazing from up here?

He looks out the window. It's too bright to see any stars.

ANNA (CONT'D)

It's nice to have someone to look at them with.

(pause)

Ron?

RON

Yeah?

ANNA

Can you put some music on?

RON

Y-yeah. Of course. Um, what?

ANNA

Something lovely.

RON

OK.

He goes back to his record player, picks a record and puts it on. MR BOJANGLES by NINA SIMONE starts playing.

RON goes back to his seat by the radio. When ANNA speaks, it's extremely slowly, with very slurred words.

ANNA

Mmmmm. Thank you.

They sit quietly for a moment, listening to the music.

RON

Anna?

ANNA

Mm?

RON

I do have one question. About the future.

ANNA

What?

RON

What's music like? In five hundred years?

Pause. ANNA gives a long sigh then, weakly:

ANNA  
Fantastic.

Pause as RON smiles through watery eyes.

RON  
Anna?

He waits for a response that doesn't come. After a moment, he places a hand on the radio and starts crying more heavily. The music grows and becomes non-diegetic.

EXT. THE PARK - DAWN

MR BOJANGLES is still playing and, from a distance, we see RON exit his hut. He looks around and takes a deep breath.

He goes over to his lawnmower, but before he turns it on, he spots the same woman from the previous morning, again with her dog and buggy, struggling to calm her crying baby.

He walks over to them. We see him exchange a few words with the mother, then crouch to be eye level with the baby.

We see the group closer. The baby quiets down as it looks into RON's eyes.

RON  
Hey, chin up. It's not the end of  
the world.

THE END