

LIVE A LITTLE LONGER

By Nigel Hurlstone

**Adapted for audio by
Steve Doherty and Nigel Hurlstone**

**Produced and Directed by
Steve Doherty of Giddy Goat Production**

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1: A Spy Outside

YVONNE ... Isy Suttie
MOTHER ... Sue Johnston
GRETA ... Rhian Green
NIGEL ... Nigel Hurlford

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A GIDDY GOAT PRODUCTION

NIGEL (N) I've made a new friend in hospital. Her name is Jackie Stannard and she's very keen to keep in touch. I've never met Jackie, but she's very concerned about my health and would like to help me return to work as soon as possible. She's sent me three texts this morning. All identical. So, I can only conclude that she's getting desperate or has a device which is faulty.

I eventually send her a message back which explains that presently, I am incapacitated. Her reply is rather brisk. "Please supply a fit note."

I ask the doctor on the ward what a 'fit note' is, suspecting that Jackie is muddled, but surprisingly, Doctor James is quick to rush to her defence. He informs me that 'sick notes' were replaced by 'fit' in 2008 and points out that it's me who's muddled, not Jackie. He's a big fan of the fit note. They help people back into the workplace with less fuss. Apparently.

When my phone bleeps again, I'm somewhat relieved to see that it's a missed call from my sister, Yvonne. I phone her back and expect an uplifting greeting, but her voice sounds less than cheery. She skips the obligatory question of asking how I am and instead, gives me a deadline.

YVONNE [on phone] I've been over to Mums for the last four weekends, so I'm bringing her over tomorrow afternoon; you can entertain her for a while. And don't say you're not well. You're well *enough*.

NIGEL [on phone] Listen Yvonne. I know mother can be rather demanding, but is it really a good idea to bring a 90-year-old woman in a wheelchair to the hospital? It'll only make her worry more. Besides, visitors can be very draining.

YVONNE [on phone] Tough shit!

-----MUSIC-----

NIGEL (N) I can hear my mother being pushed down the corridor in her wheelchair some time before I see her.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD

MOTHER Honest to God! Will you slow down! We're going that fast I'm going to fall out of this dam thing.

YVONNE There's absolutely no chance of that; you're strapped in. And it'd help if you weren't dragging your feet on the floor. Besides, if we go any slower, visiting will be over.

MOTHER I don't care whether visiting's over or not, just wait until you're 90 and being hurtled around in a chair. See how you like it.

ATMOS: OUT

NIGEL (N) When the pair eventually come into view, my sister is looking flushed and agitated. Giving me a thin-lipped smile, she deposits a bag, and my mother, by the bed.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD

YVONNE I've got a few jobs to do so I'll leave you to it. Shouldn't be gone more than a couple of hours. All the necessities are in the shopper. We freshened up earlier, so fingers crossed you won't need to do anything.

MOTHER [Grabs Yvonne's hand] Just hold on a minute. What am I going to do sitting here in a ward full of old men?

YVONNE You can talk to your son for a start!

MOTHER For two hours?

NIGEL Well it shouldn't be too much of a trial. We were on the phone for an hour last night and you seemed OK.

MOTHER That's different, there's nobody listening in.

ATMOS: OUT

NIGEL (N) Casting her eye around the ward and then shifting in her chair to ascertain if anybody is standing behind her, my mother could be checking for spies. It's a routine that she's practised for years, but one which never quite puts her at ease.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD

MOTHER You never know who's about nowadays. Or what they're up to. You've got to have your wits about you and be on the hoof. But if I'm being left, I suppose this is as good a place as any.

ATMOS: OUT

NIGEL (N) Putting the break on the wheelchair and dangling my mother's bag on the handles, my sister does not require another invitation to leave. Smiling, she paces off up the ward and doesn't look back.

I gaze at my mother from the bed, and she stares up at me from the confines of the wheelchair. It's over two months since I've seen her, and much has changed. Her cheeks have hollowed out and her eyes, whilst still bright, seem to have sunk. Her neck's gone thin, and her favourite necklace now looks cumbersome rather than jaunty.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD

MOTHER Help me off with this coat will you. Its unbearable in here. Just like
being in an oven. No wonder you can't breathe, I'm gasping myself.

ATMOS: AD LIB COAT REMOVAL

NIGEL (N) Wrestling the coat off her shoulders I smile at today's outfit; it's
the blue ombre knitted sweater teamed with a tucked trouser that I
gave her for Christmas. But I look again and see that the pattern is
splattered in marks and around the ribbing is debris of old food.

MOTHER What are you gawping at? I thought you liked this top.

NIGEL I do like it. I'm the one that bought it for you. Remember? That shade
really suits.

MOTHER I want to know why've you got such a nasty chest? I suppose you've
been going out without a coat on again.

NIGEL That's right. I'll have to mend my ways.

MOTHER Yes you will. Before it's too late.

ATMOS: OUT

NIGEL (N) Greta is working her way up the ward with refreshments. Unfortunately, the integrated hot water urn on her trolley has broken and she's having to travel back and forth to the kitchen to charge up the teapot. By the time she's reached the bottom of my bed, she checks what remains of her brew and wonders if she can squeeze out one last cup.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD / AD LIB ACTION

GRETA You like it strong don't you?

MOTHER Oooo that's too stewed for me, dear. I'll wait for a fresh pot.

GRETA Excuse me? Visitors aren't allowed drinks from the trolley. You'll have to get your own from the canteen.

MOTHER [Suddenly breathless] Oh I'm sorry sweetheart. I should've thought. All this travelling knocks me about and leaves me parched. That's the trouble when your children live so far away. Tell me darlin', do you manage to see much of your loved ones?

GRETA My Mam would be pleased if she saw less of me, not more. I'm still living at home.

MOTHER Oh, that's lovely! They don't know how lucky they are.

GRETA [Smiles] Tell you what, I'll get you a fresh cup, but don't be letting on to anybody else.

MOTHER That's ever so kind sweetheart. And don't you worry, it can be our little secret.

ATMOS: OUT

NIGEL (N) Greta retreats to the kitchen whilst my mother straightens herself in the chair, smooths out creases in her jumper and leans in, to whisper in my ear.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD

MOTHER They say there's a lid for every pan, but she'll struggle. Sour faced cow.

ATMOS: OUT

NIGEL (N) Greta's stewed tea has the same effect on every patient in this ward. Soon, we are all straining for the lavatory. The man in bay 4 manages to get to the cubicle first but occupies it for so long that my neighbour reaches for a bottle and uses that instead. Closing her eyes, my mother cringes whilst waiting for the moment to pass, but the tinkle of urine seems to persist for an extraordinary long time.

ATMOS HOSPITAL WARD – URINATION – AD LIB REACTION

MOTHER What's his problem? Prostate?

NIGEL Can you shush please? Not everyone wants to broadcast their problems to the entire ward. Besides, that gentleman's very private.

MOTHER Don't you shush me! Anyway, I *bet* that's what the matter is. Cynthia at the Luncheon Club has the same issues with her husband. He's in and out of the lavatory four and five times a night. She looks dreadful, poor thing.

ATMOS OUT

NIGEL (N) When the lavatory eventually becomes vacant, I scurry towards it, hoping to get there in time. But dashing to the toilet makes me out of puff and by the time I get back into bed, I have no wind at all. Panting, I reach for the oxygen mask dangling from the bedrail and gasp at this cold, rich air. It soothes and calms but also makes me drowsy so I close my eyes, just for a moment, and relax into the pillow. When I open them again, my mother has unbuckled herself from the wheelchair and is standing by my bed, propping herself up on a stick.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD

MOTHER If you can't cope with going to the toilet on your own then you'll have to go into a home.

NIGEL I'll be fine in a minute. And what do you say that for? Such a silly idea.

MOTHER No, it isn't, you've said it to me often enough. What's the difference?

ATMOS: OUT

NIGEL (N) Lying back in the bed, I can't think of any.

-----MUSIC-----

NIGEL (N) My sister eventually appears carrying a bag of shopping which she promptly decants onto the locker. She's bought me some treats. There's a bumper book of puzzles in case I get bored and a pack of 'Everfresh' socks that supposedly prevent the growth of bacteria that can lead to the formation of bad odours.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD

YVONNE I thought these socks might be a bonus. It reeks in here. And I got the foodstuffs you wanted, Mum. Apart from those pineapple jellies. They've run out of pineapple, so I bagged some tangerine fruit pots instead.

MOTHER How can you run out of pineapple?

ATMOS: OUT

NIGEL (N) Holding the fruit pots in her hand, mother squeezes her face in disapproval, pokes her nail through the foil top and sniffs.

ATMOS: HOSPITAL WARD – AD LIB ACTION

MOTHER These things smell strange. I'll try one now, but if I don't like it, the rest can go in the bin. Or we can leave them here...

NIGEL (N) The only hiatus to this plan is the absence of anything to eat the jelly with, but it is soon resolved by the appearance of Doctor James.

MOTHER Look! There's a doctor over there. He'll get me something. Excuse me young man! Can you be a love and just get me a spoon for this dessert?

ATMOS: OUT

-----MUSIC-----

NIGEL (N) I consider turning off my phone when mother has left; I'm desperate for a nap, but decide to leave it switched on in case anything happens during my sister's drive home. She calls an hour later to confirm all is well; but maybe not for long.

YVONNE [On phone) It's really, really, difficult with Mum. She's failing. You being stuck in hospital doesn't help. I'm completely on my own with it all.

NIGEL (N) I assure her that I'll be home again soon and everything will be back to normal. But there's a pause on the other end of the line and I begin to wonder if she's distracted. It might be the children.

YVONNE [On phone] Normal? What do you think that's going to be? Because I can't picture it.

NIGEL [On phone] Well maybe picture this. Mother could come and live with you. You rub along well enough. There's that spare room and a toilet.

YVONNE [On phone] Mother could come and live here? In the spare room? What planet are you on because it's not the same one as me.

NIGEL (N) She puts the phone down and doesn't call back. Later, I lie awake wondering what the future holds and take in the rituals of the ward. I'm quite comfortable here. My oxygen is close at hand, I have chosen tomorrow's breakfast, dinner and tea from the menu and am looking forward to the fish and chips.

These new socks look quite appealing too; they're nice and long with a cheery coloured stripe on the toe. If that friendly nurse is on duty tomorrow, I might ask him to help me in the bathroom and treat myself to a long soak.

I take a cursory glance at the puzzle book and turn to the section marked 'word search'. Without even trying, I manage to find 'adversity,' 'unthinkable', 'payroll', 'hallucinate' and 'nightmare' within only a few minutes. Unfortunately, I'm hindered from making further discoveries by my phone ringing. It's mother.

MOTHER [On phone] When can you come home? Only I think there's someone outside.