

# **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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## **4: Is It A Mushroom?**

GRETA ... Rhian Green  
KEN/MAN ... Sion Pritchard  
SISTER ... Isy Suttie  
DOCTOR ... Tudur Owen  
NIGEL ... Nigel Hurlford

Adapted for audio by Nigel Hurlstone and Steve Doherty  
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**A GIDDY GOAT PRODUCTION**

NIGEL (N) Greta has returned from a week's leave and is back on the ward serving lunch. Casting her eye around the beds she notes that nothing much has changed; every bay is still occupied, just by different bodies. Her shoulders droop at the prospect of another day, and rather than being refreshed, she seems more lack lustre than usual.

ATMOS HOSPITAL WARD

GRETA You still here then? I need these menu cards filling in. Like now. It's not hard.

ATMOS OUT

NIGEL (N) Today's lunch, a risotto, looks rather unpalatable, so I pluck up courage and ask for a sandwich instead. Snatching the plate away, Greta checks her supplies and confirms that she has a few spares. There's a choice between chicken or turkey. Selecting the chicken, I begin to unwrap it but notice that the meat appears rather pink. There's also a mushroom stuck to the crust. Seeing my face pucker at the sight of it, Greta inspects the sandwich but finds nothing alarming.

ATMOS HOSPITAL WARD

GRETA            It's got a bit of ham in it I expect. No harm in that. No harm in a mushroom either. Honest to God, I've never met anyone as faddy as you. I'll do it this once but then that's it. Turkey or chicken, it's all the same anyway.

NIGEL            (N) Leaning on the trolley, she shuffles straight past Ken who has just been wheeled onto the ward. He tries to grab her attention by sticking his hand in the air and shouting an order for tea, but to no avail.

ATMOS            HOSPITAL WARD

KEN                That woman is absolutely dreadful! She needs reporting.

NIGEL            I think you'll find the best way to get along is to make friends with Greta. It can be tricky, but well worth it.

KEN                She's paid to do a job and there's plenty of other people who could step into her shoes. Get rid. Find someone else. That's my opinion.

ATMOS            OUT

NIGEL            (N) Ken seems unable to settle and finds his new surroundings extremely challenging. It's unfortunate that his bed is located next to the toilet. As in any shared space, the passage of traffic arriving and departing from the facilities is rather relentless. Discussing his concerns with Sister the next morning, he prioritises his complaints but places one firmly at the top of his list.

ATMOS      HOSPITAL WARD

KEN                      That toilet stinks. And it's your responsibility.

SISTER                Is that so Mr. Hannigan? Well, we'll see what we can do to put your mind at rest.

KEN                      I expect something to be done about this sooner rather than later.  
And if I don't get satisfaction, I want to be moved. Understand?

SISTER                Oh perfectly Mr. Hannigan. Unfortunately, we've no spare beds at the moment, but I'll keep your request in mind.

NIGEL                (N) When she's gone, Ken clasps his hands together and tries to catch my eye.

KEN                      That's how you deal with these people. Firm but fair.

ATMOS      OUT

NIGEL (N) His sense of triumph seems to be justified, since within the hour, Sister has sent staff along to service the lavatory. A woman in a burgundy uniform appears pushing a very large trolley that turns out to be a cleaning station on wheels. She also has some hazard 'A-Boards' announcing 'cleaning in progress'.

Ken watches her from his bed, his eyes moving in motion to her mopping before frowning at the mucky looking cloth she selects to restore sparkle to the sanitary ware.

Placing her hands on her hips when the job is done, she surveys her handiwork and awards herself a nod of appreciation. But her moment of recognition is cut short by Ken who is of the opinion that there is still more to do.

#### ATMOS HOSPITAL WARD

KEN I don't think you've finished just yet young lady. Look at that sealant around the sink and lavatory. It's black with mould. Needs some bleach on it.

#### ATMOS OUT

NIGEL (N) The cleaner looks quizzically at this man pointing at her accomplishments, smiles and pushes her trolley away up the corridor, singing as she goes. The air is certainly fresher, but she leaves the mop, bucket and hazard boards behind.

---- MUSIC ----

NIGEL (N) I'm saved from further critique of the cleaner by a doctor. Taking a seat by the bed he wonders if I might spare him a few minutes of my time. I am instantly impressed; he has beautiful glasses. He shakes my hand and I tell him that his spectacles are extremely stylish; very unusual and I expect, rather unique. He touches them with a finger and drops his head a little.

ATMOS            HOSPITAL WARD

DOCTOR You don't think they're too much?

NIGEL (N) I reassure him that they look marvellous but get momentarily distracted by the TV. My favourite DIY broadcast is just starting.

DOCTOR Am I disturbing your programme? Only I can come back later if you'd prefer.

NIGEL (N) I see Ken from the corner of my eye shaking his head at this kind offer to re-schedule before turning over in the bed to face mine. I tell the doctor that I'd be glad to be disturbed and he pulls up a chair.

DOCTOR You'll be pleased to know we have a diagnosis for you. I'm sorry it's taken so long. We've been going around in circles with this one.

NIGEL (N) Ken shuffles even closer, and I begin to cough, hawking up what appear to be dark brown plugs of sticky mucus and blood. As I reach for a tissue, the doctor rushes to find a pot.



DOCTOR        Oh don't waste it! Catch it in this and we'll send it for testing.

NIGEL        (N) He presents me with a tiny jar with a screw top lid. I spit in it but hesitate to hand it back. This filthy looking slime is really rather shaming.

DOCTOR        Lovely job! That's marvellous!

#### ATMOS        OUT

NIGEL        (N) Prising the container out of my grasp and screwing on the lid, the doctor holds it up to the light, and peering over the top of his glasses, examines the contents for some considerable time. It looks for all the world like a miniature jar of marmalade that has been contaminated by jam, and he seems thrilled with it. When he gets around to the actual diagnosis of what has ailed me for months, it takes him only seconds to say and is only three words long.

#### ATMOS        HOSPITAL WARD

DOCTOR        Chronic Pulmonary Aspergillosis. As-per-gill-o-sis. In layman's terms, a fungal infection. A bit like mushrooms growing in your lungs. It's difficult to diagnose and rather rare. But we can treat it.

NIGEL        Can you cure it?

DOCTOR        We can manage it.

NIGEL Will it kill me?

DOCTOR I can't say.

ATMOS OUT

NIGEL (N) I feel my eyes prick with tears as he takes my hands in his and clutches them tight. I sense the sweat on his palms mix with the cold sweat on mine and he gets up from the chair, leans over the bed and hugs me. I feel the dampness of his shirt, smell scent on his neck and hold on to his embrace for as long as possible; it makes me feel instantly brighter. After uncoupling my arms from his, the doctor reaches into his top pocket and retrieves some papers.

ATMOS HOSPITAL WARD

DOCTOR I've brought you a few leaflets. They'll explain everything and give you some idea of what the treatment entails. Have a look when you feel up to it. We've just redesigned them. This one's got pictures.

ATMOS OUT

NIGEL (N) The leaflets have a very intriguing image on the front depicting the spores that are making me ill and printed along the top are the words 'Aspergillus Fumigatus' written in a type of curly script that might be lifted straight out of Darwin's notebooks. The source of this exotic sounding mould turns out to be disappointingly common. According to the doctor, it can linger almost anywhere.

ATMOS      HOSPITAL WARD

DOCTOR      Oh you'd be surprised where it crops up. Compost bins and piles of old leaves are the most predictable locales, but carpets, old pillows, bedding and damp rooms can be harbingers too. Mind you, mouldy bathrooms are *particular* breeding grounds.

ATMOS      AD LIB ACTION

NIGEL      (N) I hear a sharp intake of breath from my neighbour followed by a series of tiny coughs. The doctor gets up from my bedside and shakes my hand. He has more patients to see.

DOCTOR      Lovely to meet you sir. The Infectious Diseases Department will be in touch shortly. They call themselves the IDD, which can be rather mysterious if you're not prepared. All the best.

NIGEL      (N) Before the doctor has even left the ward, Ken clears his throat and issues another pronouncement.

KEN      So, it's all confirmed and official. You've got an infectious disease. That's what he's just said.

ATMOS      OUT

NIGEL (N) I give my full attention to the TV. The homeowner is looking extremely pleased with her new minimal space and remarks how easy it is to keep clean. I begin to wonder if I should keep less clutter; it may be the answer to a healthier lifestyle. Ken coughs and grunts, before seizing his alarm bell, pressing the button, and holding it there. Nobody comes.

Diverting my attention from the TV for a second, I point out that there is lots of activity in the corridor and a woman is crying; maybe the staff are busy.

ATMOS      HOSPITAL WARD

KEN And maybe they just can't be bothered. Have you thought about that soft lad?

SISTER [Flustered] Now then gentleman. Sorry to keep you waiting. What's the trouble here?

KEN The "trouble," as you put it, is this. I've come in here with one thing, start to get better and now it looks like I'll go home with another. What type of awful merry-go-round do you think that is?

SISTER Exactly what would you like me to do Mr. Hannigan? And please don't shout. We have some very poorly people in here.

KEN                    You can get that mould seen to in the toilet for a start and make sure that folks with infectious diseases don't contaminate the rest of us. I don't want mushrooms growing in my lungs. In fact, I want to be moved. Now.

ATMOS            OUT

NIGEL                (N) That evening, the ward is much quieter. Ken has been transferred to a side room. But I'm worried by this disturbance. There's fear in contagion, and I'm mortified to be the source of it. Thankfully, Greta is surprisingly sanguine about the incident.

ATMOS            HOSPITAL WARD

GRETA                Well, I'll still touch you; but I'm not going to. People take things the wrong way.

MAN                   [Lewd] You can come and touch me anytime you like love. Ready and waiting.

GRETA                Told you. This is what I have to put up with. No wonder I'm depressed.

ATMOS            OUT

NIGEL (N) Greta does seem low. I watch as she gazes out of the window whilst scraping the plates and tell her that she needs to relax more. She doesn't seem to hear, or at least stop what she's doing. "Have a night off!" I suggest, "re-charge your batteries." Eventually, she turns around to face me, her cheeks as pale as putty.

ATMOS HOSPITAL WARD

GRETA Have a night off? Did you just say, "Have a night off?" Fat chance. I get out of here and do it all again someplace else.

ATMOS OUT

NIGEL (N) She turns away and goes back to the plates before heaving the waste into the corridor and wiping spills off her trolley. The setting sun is bright against the window. Pausing for a while, she looks out over the car park, her silhouette hunched and heavy against the sky.

ATMOS HOSPITAL WARD

GRETA I'm nothing me. Just a fat, brainless hamster stuck on one of those wheels. And I'm going round and round and round.

ATMOS FADE/AD LIB ACTION

NIGEL (N) I watch as she circles a spoon in a dish and wait for her to stack it with the rest. The dish is empty, but she still scrapes. I heave myself off the bed and go to join her at the window, arms outstretched to give her a hug. She turns towards me, puts down the spoon and smiles for the first time that day.

But I have a change of mind. Suddenly, I think that giving her a hug is a really bad idea; better not get too close. I flop into a chair instead and gasp at my inhaler. Greta goes back to scraping her bowls at the window and I point out the stars, going round and round the sun. Twinkling and beautiful.