

More Hugs for Nana Hinny

By JoJo Kirtley

Nana Hinny (Dulcie Connor) loves hugs from her great granddaughter, singing at her local 'Singing for the Brain' group and drinking decent whiskey. She misses her beloved Stan but she's content with life, watching the birds from her bungalow which overlooks Killy Lake...until the global pandemic changes everything.

Character

Dulcie Connor/Nana Hinny, 85 years old, lives on her own, widow, has a son called Gladstone who is married to Karen, a granddaughter, Flo who is expecting her second and a great granddaughter, Billy who she is close to. *(impersonates all of the characters she talks about)*

Pat from social services, Non-speaking role. Woman from social services who has come to assess Dulcie.

SFX- Bird tweets. Nana Hinny singing; 'Danny Boy'.

SFX Knitting needles. SFX Doorbell. SFX Knitting Needles. SFX Doorbell.

SFX Big sigh/Tuts. Shuffle to door. Door opening.

Nana Hinny Pat from social services? Howay in pet. I'm Dulcie O'Connor also known as Nana Hinny. (*SFX closing door, walking in, the plastic aprons*). Take a seat. Admire the sights of Killy Lake while I make you a brew. (*SFX window shutting.*) I'll shut this window in case you catch ya death of cold. (*SFX Clicking of kettle/ kettle boiling*) You're in your full PPE, I see. Looking like you're dressed as if you're about to perform open heart surgery. Whey you boys. Bet it's been a tough year for ya, hinny? Having to wear those bloody masks everywhere. (*Shuffling of paper.*) Do you need a pen, pet? Let's see if I can find... (*SFX shuffling around*) No? E hinny that's a fancy computer. I can't be doing with all this modern stuff. (*SFX windows turning on. Tapping of keys.*) (*Dulcie clears her throat*) So, you're here because my family think I'm going crazy? Let's not hide behind words like 'assessment' and 'meeting my needs' and 'how you can help to better support me'. Whey I'm on the decline and they want me in a home, Is that what they've told you? (*SFX Tapping of keys.*) It's O'Connor. My Stan hated it when people left out the O. (*Laughs*) (*SFX kettle boiling.*) Whey ya boys. I'll make that coffee while you're on filling in forms. (*SFX clinking of spoons, mugs, pouring of milk.*) Most people *have* lost the plot this last 18 months. I watched that in documentary on ITV. (beat) It's been *normal* to be like this and I'm not surprised. Are you, Pat? (*SFX opening of whiskey*) I'm having an Irish one... Did they tell ya about me drinking too? (*laughs*) (*SFX of clinking of mugs*) Here you go. Now before you start...I want my say first. (*SFX Slurps her drink*) Mmmm that's canny brew. (*SFX sits down, sighs*) Now...every day I talk to my Stan. I read him bits from 'The Evening Chronicle'. (*SFX sound of paper crunching.*) Obviously, I know he's dead so don't panic and write that in your assessment. (*Sfx Typing*) I remember *that* day so clearly. (beat) Wed 8th January 2020 BP...Before Pandemic... my

memory's as sharp as ever. (beat) There was a small article after the obituaries but before the local ads...about a mysterious flu-like virus in China. Been detected in dozens of people in the city of Wuhan. Never heard of Wuhan before. Was advising travellers to China to avoid contact with animals. Made me laugh because not that many people from Killingworth would be ganin ower to China so we had nowt to worry about, did wi? Whey your boys. (*laughs*) Other news that day involved Prince Harry & Meghan announcing plans to step back as senior members of the royal family. Stan was never a big royalist. Always said Prince Andrew looked shifty. There was some Love Island gossip in there too, gearing up for the new series. What a load of piffle. (beat) And Stormzy was having the first number one of 2020. (*Sings/Hums 'You never too big for your boots' laughs*) 85-year-old but I know me grime. (beat) Once, I had wor Billy, my great granddaughter in stitches. (*impersonates Billy*) 'Nana Hinny, how do **you** know Stormzy?' She said. (NH) 'Whey, I saw him on that Brits swearing at Boris Johnson, Billy hinny...And anyone who tells him where to go deserves a bloody award.' She belly laughed. Bless her. (*laughs*) Of course, I made the mistake of saying it right in front of Karen, my daughter-in-law, second wife to Gladstone, my son... Karen tutted in disgust. I heard her go on one. (*impersonates Karen*) 'Gladstone... I'm worried that your Flo's pushing her agenda on to your mam.' (*Back to NH*) Flo's my granddaughter and Billy's mam. Karen went on: 'Poor Billy...she's only 12 years old... It's so unethical...you need to say something to Flo. It really isn't my place to meddle.' (*SFX sl*) Ahhh she's a reet gobshite that Karen, like. Flo was late picking Billy up that day which made me late for my 'Singing for Brains' group. Wor Flo works for a women's charity in South Shields...gets held up a lot because they're short staffed. Lack of funding and all that. I don't mind if I'm late because it's not her fault. Karen-who's technically Flo's step-mam- is always on her case. 'What about men, Flo? They get abused too.' Gladstone calls her a 'feminazi'- because wanting equality for women makes you a Nazi, Pat. Whey ya boys. (*Laughs*) Flo did make me watch that 'Handmaid's

Tale' and bought me a t-shirt that says 'Womxn Up' on it but that's hardly fascism. It was Karen who read an article in the Daily Mail about Tradwives and how to submit to your husband. (beat) It's not like she's very hearth and home herself. It's 2021, Pat. Long gone are the days women stay at home and bake banana bread, right? Unless you're in a national lockdown during a global pandemic. (*Howls*) I did take up knitting, for the bairn. Could only make these baby booties. Got quite addicted. Made me relax. Flo bought me a load of purple, white and green wool and I stitched a little butterfly into each pair. She said, "Nana-what an amazing homage to Emily Wilding-Davidson, one of the Iron butterflies." You knaa, the wife from Morpeth who was killed by the King's horse protesting for the vote? (beat) Might do a bit of knitting now. Calm me nerves. (*SFX Knitting needles clicking*) I went over the top with it all. Had to stash a bag full in the spare room. Flo said she'd give them to charity. Karen wasn't amused. She said, "Dulcie, why choose those colours?" I shrugged. She went on one again so to shut a up I said... "How do butterflies have sex?" She nearly choked on her green tea. (*SFX knitting*) A few weeks later, about the end of Feb...before we were told to 'stay at home and save lives', Billy asked me out right. 'Nana Hinnie'...she said...'why are you singing for your brain?' I telt her... 'It helps me with my memories' and that we're just a load of old fogies who like to belt out a few tunes. Gabi's the woman who organises it all...well...she used to...BP...she's a retired nurse...part of the Windrush generation, specialises in children's palliative care. What an amazing woman and what a singer; let me tell you. (beat) That week's theme was Ireland. (*SFX getting up & rummaging around draws*) Got the worksheet somewhere...We started with 'Danny Boy' and ended with 'Whisky in a Jar'. Gabi baked her famous Guinness Cake and we all had a piece and talked about our travels to the Emerald Isle. Here it is. (*Sings: As I was goin' over, The Cork and Kerry mountains...*) That was the last time I ever saw that group together... all alive...and Billy, it was the last time...she ever hugged me because her mam was ill with morning sickness and didn't have the energy to visit until it was too late. I

remember that day. That last hug. BP. Before: the lockdowns, the Masks, PPE, handsanitiser, homeschooling, foodbanks, Barnard Castle, Chris Whitty, vigils for murdered women, the u-turns, the vaccines...the deaths... and no more hugs for Nana Hinny. (*starts to cry. SFX*) No, Pat... I'm alright...imagine not having any human contact with someone for months...over a year even? It's not right. (*SFX phone rings*) (*Nana Hinny counts the rings-one, two, three-Suddenly it stops*)No need to get it, Pat. That's my Gladstone ringing to remind me to take me drugs. Three rings for three pills. (*SFX popping of pills, pouring of water from the tape, slurping of drink whilst speaking the next lines*) Can you have a word with your lot? The carers...I'm bloody sick of getting my hair washed with that vosene. Every day they're asking if my hairs been shampoo'd and if I've cleaned me (*lowers voice*) ninny nanny. I've told wor Gladstone, I don't need them. But Karen's insisting she can't care for me 24-7 which is a load of piffle because a soggy lasagne and a reminder once a day to take me tablets is not her being my carer, is it Pat? (*sings*) 'Oh Danny Boy...the pipes, the pipes are calling...'(*composes herself*) Let's fast forward to Monday 23rd March. Boris Johnson ordering police to enforce a strict coronavirus lockdown, a ban on gatherings of more than two people and strict limits on exercise. (*impersonates Boris*) "You must stay at home." You should not be going shopping except for essentials like food and medicine – and you should do this as little as you can," I said to wor Gladstone.. 'whiskey's an essential.' He disagreed and refused to let me go to Morrisons. Whey ya boys. I was a prisoner in me own home. Even Flo rang to check I hadn't left the house and asked if I wanted her Miles to do a shop. So...(whispers) I went out. Piffle to them all. Folks were going mental for toilet roll and all I wanted was a bottle of pop and some bird feed. Bumped into Gabi from singing group, she was preoccupied with stock piling tins of tuna. Had to cancel her trip back to Jamaica and didn't know when she'd see her family again. (beat) Whey I made it back in one piece... All that scaremongering about care homes and the virus killing the elderly and I was alreet. It's terrible what happened. Sending back the

infected, knowing it would kill more. No-one cares about us old folk...Karen said I'm lucky not to be in one. At least I'd have other people to talk to. Whey I know I speak to the birds. Flo told me 'robins appear when loved ones are near' when Stan died (*she laughs*) because one kept bobbin around me garden...and now, more than ever he's there. Probably checking up in case I leave the house too. (*SFX opens window*) Is that what you doing, Stan? That clapping for the NHS scared him off for a while. Slight Pause. (*SFX Taping of needles-knitting*) It was only going to be three weeks, that's what they said. I could have hacked three weeks inside, knitting. (beat) Poor Flo was furloughed eventually. She was worried about the women. Scared that they were being abused more or couldn't escape. She zoomed them for a while-whatever that means but then, she had too much on home schooling Billy. (beat) About mid-May I gets this phonecall from Gabi's daughter. Gabi passed away. The funeral was online but I don't have the internet, Pat. It got her. She'd volunteered to work back on the Covid wards and spent a week on a ventilator. (*Sings Cushie Butterfield*) Gabi always liked that one. I'm nearly done, Pat...When it got to June 2020, we could sit out in me garden, right? So the gang came round to celebrate my 85th. Karen had made salted caramel cupcakes, I swear I could taste hand sanitiser in them. (beat) They still wouldn't hug me, you knaa? Mainly because that Hancock said I'm one of these vulnerables and I had to shield. I said to wor Billy it sounds like one of those Marvel films, you like. She said...'Nana Hinny, ...you're an avenger.' (*She laughs*) They wouldn't come in...on my birthday as well...they all stood at the window staring in like I was an animal at the zoo. (beat) Flo had brought her ultrasound. 'It's a girl, Nana Hinny.' She pressed it up against the window so I could see. Poor Flo hadn't seen a midwife for weeks, had to go to her last baby scan without her partner, Miles and was struggling wearing masks. Looked tired. Running around doing this home-schooling malarkey on top of everything else. We chatted for a while about Miles being told he was a keyworker but had no PPE. His work expected him to shove a load of lads in a work van and when he refused they

threatened his job. She was stressed but the bairn looked happy, playing outside on the grass, next to the cherry blossom tree and the blue hydrangeas, my Stan planted. Then, Gladstone and Karen rocked up. Karen was already on one with the hand-sanitiser, squirting anyone in sight. Quite brazenly she announced that we were breaking the law, having a gathering and risking their health; 'Well...what about your Dad and me? We're old too.' Flo looked like she was going to pounce on her. Karen continued to rant on about how we'll never get through this if we all go to gatherings when we've been told to stay indoors. Flo finally snapped; 'If Dominic Cummings can go to Barnard Castle then I can see my Nana Hanny on her birthday.' Gladstone was silent as per. Then, Billy walked straight up to me window and knocked on. She shouted, 'THIS IS AWKWARD, NANA.' Everyone else in the garden stopped and looked. I stood up and downed me drink, stepped towards the window and shouted back; 'Think about how I feel, Billy, pet...your Grandad Gladstone and Karen are in my bubble.' We both laughed. She placed her hand up against the window and I matched hers with mine. Then, I walked out of the living room and ignored them all. At that point, I liked shielding. (beat) Now Pat, this is where it all went a bit peared-shaped for me, in my mind. About Summer-time. The rules were confusing-like you could go for a pint with your pal but Flo couldn't take Miles to her maternity appointments. People started to get angry and rightly so. There was those anti-vaxxers at first, never got my head around them lot. Karen bleated on about not having hers, she wanted to follow a natural path and use gems instead. Soon changed her mind when she thought she'd miss out on going to her all inclusive hols to Benidorm. (*Laughs*) It all got a bit serious though in between Black Lives Matter and Reclaim the Streets. I watched those protests on 'Look North' and mentioned it to my Stan because he would have been into all that standing up for your rights. Karen moaned on about the protests being a breach of coronavirus lockdown rules and how no-one was wearing masks or social distancing. I said, 'Karen...were you there?' She said, 'The government has warned against protesting during the pandemic.' I

said... 'piffle to them lot, Karen...we're talking about murder, corruption, police brutality.' I was a miner's wife, Pat, during the strikes. So, I know a little of what it's like to have the media, the government and the general population against you. Not that I'm comparing just showing a bit of solidarity. Karen herself was raging. She dropped off yet another lasagne and mumbled on about, 'All Lives Matter' and something about Meghan and Harry having a lot to answer for. Then, she said it...the thing that made me snap. 'When did you become so woke, Dulcie?' Well, that was it for me, Pat. I stood up, downed me whiskey and screamed in her face: *(SFX Dulcie stops knitting and stands. She screams this.)* 'In 1963, Karen...Martin Luther King...I have a dream. When did you become a racist?' That cracked her off and it made Gladstone angry. That's when they must have rang you. Told you that I was on the decline. *(beat)* Flo had her baby in September. She had to labour on her own until she could push. Then Miles was allowed in but with his mask on. That upset me. Because when I had Gladstone on my own, it was scary. You kind of hope that things have improved for granddaughter but one global pandemic and it's piffle to those rights for thousands of women. Flo did say the midwives were wonderful though so thank god for them. They called her Robin, the baby. I wasn't keen. Flo tried to explain that it was something to do with me talking to Robin's and Stan. Still wasn't keen. Worst bit ...I wasn't allowed to hold her. They came round with her *once* but it was cold and I couldn't see her properly. *(beat)* Christmas came. I was on my own because last minute they changed the rules and Karen went into panic mode so she left my Christmas dinner on my porch. It was cold. I drank a lot of whiskey. Then, the vaccine rollout was announced. I made them put my jab in my left arm because my right arm's for drinking. *(She laughs)* In January, I read an article...here I'll try and find it. *(SFX shuffling around)* It was about what made you scream during the pandemic. *(She screams)* Sorry, pet. Did I make you jump? Whey you boys. I don't know where it is. *(SFX shuffling)* Maybe it was on the news because I can't find it. And I remember lots of people screaming, mostly women

because they're the ones who had to put up with the most according to the UN that's the United Nations, Pat...I watched a report about it on Jeremy Vine. Homeschooling was number one, then Boris Johnson, domestic abuse, teachers not receiving the vaccine early, pregnant women losing their jobs, lack of access to medical care, people refusing to wear masks, bad internet connections, loneliness.*(drifts off)* Do you know what makes me want to scream, Pat? That they're killing women. I've seen that on the BBC and all... women can't even breathe without men wanting to kick, punch, smack, stab, burn us like witches. It's the new pandemic...I heard that on Loose women. *(beat)* This poor woman in Wales-Ruth Williams, married 30 odd years choked to death by her husband after five days in lockdown. A male judge said her fella was suffering from depression and anxiety because of covid-19... so he only got five years. Their daughter said her dad's a gentle giant and wouldn't hurt a fly. *(shouts)* 'eeee Hinny...He murdered ya mam.' *(pause)* It's like her life was worth nothing, Pat. Ruth Williams...Ruth Williams...Ruth Williams...*(becoming more erratic)* Flo left a candle on my doorstep and asked me to light it for Sarah Everard. Poor lass was murdered by a policeman, Pat. A lit the candle in her memory. Made me think of my Dad. He was a wrong 'un. Flo would call him a predator. He spent years doing the unthinkable to my mam even when she had a collapsed womb. I worry, years later for my own great granddaughters. ...Oh and they can blame a pandemic...but the pandemic has only aggravated it. It's all gone a bit 'Handmaid's Tale' Flo would say...'Blessed be the fruit'. Under his eye... *(beat)* Billy sat on my step. Mask on. 'Nana', she said, 'I miss you.' Tears rolling down her face. 'It's only been 12 days, hinny' I said. 'Try 12 months', she said. Took her for a walk around the lake. We held hands and screamed. The scream bounced off the water. A few swans looked at us in disgust. Yeh... we broke the rules, we didn't social distance and then, we hugged. But...I'd do it again in a heartbeat. That hug felt...so good. All those months of nothing. No contact with anyone. Not being allowed to hold my great granddaughter and you wonder why I'm like this. There's been worse

rule breaks over these few past months from politicians and they're still running this country...so piffle to you all. When I pulled away, she was crying. We both were. (*upset*). If that makes me crazy then so be it. They'll be more hugs for Nana Hinny soon and I'll welcome each and every one of them. I don't mind going into a home now anyways...at least I won't be on my own. They might even have a singing group. I could suggest we have a Stormzy theme and I teach them all Vossi Bop. (*Laughs-SFX of knitting-to the beat of Vossi Bop?*)

Nana Hinny hums Stormzy's Vossi Bop