

Midsummer Madness...

In which James finally gets over the wall...

A LOCAL residential home with dementia care offers me two weeks' respite, which is enough to spring James from the clutches of the NHS.

I say "offers"- "*sells for a eye-wateringly large sum of money*" would be a more accurate description of this transaction - and I try not to wince as I calculate it would have been far cheaper to send James for an all-inclusive two weeks in the Caribbean.

But it will allow me to see how James is in a more domestic environment than the ward in which he will be encouraged to wash and dress himself as far as he is able: and it will give me time to find someone myself who will help me care for him at home.

The hospital rings to tell me he is on his way, so I load the car and as I drive up to the care home I see the ambulance already drawing away.

The Eagle has landed and five weeks after first being taken to hospital James is back on home turf.

At least I *think* it is James - an over-assiduous carer at the hospital has given him a shave in preparation for his move, and instead of a bearded, moustachioed husband, I have one who is, for the first time in 35 years, oddly clean-shaven.

I unpack his clothes, and hand him a cold beer before putting him through his paces.

Can you stand up? I ask, and he pushes himself up from his chair and takes a few faltering steps across the room, which is more than I have seen him do in weeks.

And I am encouraged too by the home's background play list.

It is not - as I had half expected - Vera Lynne, regardless of the fact that she was of a generation old enough to have been James' mother - but a more sixties-appropriate selection of *Simon and Garfunkel*, *Lulu* and *The Beatles*.

Do you remember Simon and Garfunkel? I ask James, who took me and our younger siblings to see them at the Royal Albert Hall more than 50 years ago.

He shakes his head unable to recall either them or the evening's *faux pas* which nearly got us lynched.

Invited by the harmonious duo to shout out requests at the end of their set, my younger brother suddenly started yelling "*Go home! Go home!*" to the intense annoyance of the fervent fans thronged around us.

It turned out that what he *really* wanted to hear was *Homeward Bound* - a mistake I think we can all agree could have happened to anyone.

But meanwhile James is confused about where he is and why.

"I'm not at home, am I?" he asks, taking in his new surroundings, then adds charmingly "but if *you* are here, *it doesn't matter...*"

If not quite at home, he is at least one step nearer - and only time will tell if respite care will indeed provide the necessary *Bridge over Troubled Waters* I am hoping for.