

THE LADY IN THE VAN

Written by
Alan Bennett

Based on his memoir

The sound of squealing brakes, then a car crash.

FADE IN

1 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. DAY (1960) 1

A country lane c. 1960 with MISS SHEPHERD at the wheel of a van barrelling along, her face set and anxious. Distantly we hear the sound of a police siren (or bell it would be in 1960). She pulls the van into a side road or clearing and waits, ducking behind the seat as she sees the police car pass the end of the road. MISS SHEPHERD rights herself, checks the side of the van. Wipes her hand on it. Blood. She crosses herself. Then starts up the van and drives off the way she has come.

As she turns the corner, we see that the police car has stopped at the end of the road. A solitary policeman, UNDERWOOD, gets out of the car and watches the van disappear.

ROLL TITLES over -

2 INT. CONCERT HALL. NIGHT 2

A glamorous pianist in a décolleté evening gown (along the lines of Anne Todd in 'The Seventh Veil' c. 1947) playing some bravura piano concerto.

As the titles end, so does the concerto, and we hear ALAN BENNETT in voice over and cut to -

3 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STUDY. DAY 3

ALAN BENNETT at his desk, writing.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

The smell is sweet, with urine only a minor component, the prevalent odour suggesting the inside of someone's ear. Dank clothes are there too, wet wool and onions, which she eats raw, plus what for me has always been the essence of poverty, damp newspaper.

The sound of the lavatory flushing. ALAN BENNETT looks towards the toilet door.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)(CONTD.)

Miss Shepherd's multi-flavoured
aroma is masked by a liberal
application of various talcum
powders, with Yardley's Lavender
always a favourite, and currently
it is this genteel fragrance that
dominates, the second subject, as
it were, in her odoriferous
concerto.

MISS SHEPHERD comes out of the lavatory, pulls down her
skirt, and leaves through the front door. We see something of
the inside of the house and its contents, still at this date,
c. 1976, fairly uncluttered.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

But as she goes the original theme
returns, her own primary odour now
triumphantly restated and left
hanging in the house long after she
has departed.

Out of the window we see Miss Shepherd's van parked in the
drive and MISS SHEPHERD herself rearranges some plastic bags
beneath the van. She is tall and though her changes of
costume will not be described in detail, she is generally
dressed in an assortment of coats and headscarves but with a
variety of other hats superimposed on the headscarves. Old
raincoats figure, as do carpet slippers and skirts which have
often been lengthened by the simple process of sewing on
additional strips of material. She is about sixty-five.

ALAN BENNETT

(at the desk, speaks)

Tell her.

As he watches through the window, A.B. - his other self -
comes out of the house.

4/6

EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY.

4/6

A.B. approaches the van.

A.B.

(at the van)

Miss Shepherd. In future I would
prefer it if you didn't use my
lavatory. There are lavatories at
the bottom of the High Street. Use
those.

MISS SHEPHERD

They smell. I'm by nature a very
clean person.

(MORE)

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

I have a testimonial for a Clean Room, awarded me some years ago, and do you know my aunt, herself spotless said I was the cleanest of my mother's children,

(A.B. gives up, and goes)
particularly in the unseen places.

7

INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STUDY. DAY

7

A.B. catches ALAN BENNETT'S eye as he passes the study door.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

The writer is double. There is the self who does the writing and there is the self who does the living. And they talk. They argue. Writing is talking to one's self, and I've been doing it all my life, and long before I first saw this house five years ago.

CUT TO:

9

EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

9

Five years earlier, possibly with a subtitle, though the unkempt nature of the house and a 'For Sale' sign indicates that this is earlier. House empty. No van.

A.B. comes round the corner of Inverness Street into Gloucester Crescent, and then into the garden with an ESTATE AGENT

A.B.

Fifteen?

ESTATE AGENT

Number 10 fetched seventeen.

A.B. looks discouraged.

ESTATE AGENT (CONT'D)

Come on. I thought you had a play on in the West End. These houses have got so much potential. Once you get rid of the junk. Well there you have it: Gloucester Crescent. Good street. On the up and up.

A.B. and the ESTATE AGENT walk up Gloucester Crescent. The street is alive with refurbishing activity. As he speaks workmen bring out a nice marble fireplace out of No. 63 and shove it in the skip, breaking it in the process. More workmen carry materials into another house.

ESTATE AGENT (CONT'D)

Big motor, have you? Loads of room.

10 INT/EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STUDY. DAY 10

A.B. carries boxes of books into the empty study. Through the window we see two men unloading a table or desk from a removal van. The sign now says 'Sold'.

11 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY 11

A.B. leaves the house

A.B.

12 EXT. CONVENT. DAY 12

The van stalled nearby, opposite a Convent. From MISS SHEPHERD'S POV we see A.B., with a WHSmith bag, through the van windscreen which is grimy, with the dashboard hosting a variety of objects like a half-eaten tin of baked beans, a packet of biscuit also half-eaten, various tissues, packets of soap flakes etc.

A.B. stops to look at a cross (with a painted crucified Christ). MISS SHEPHERD appears at his shoulder.

MISS SHEPHERD

You're not St John, are you?

A.B.

St John who?

MISS SHEPHERD

St John. The disciple whom Jesus loved.

A.B.

No. My name's Bennett.

MISS SHEPHERD

Well, if you're not St John I need a push for the van. It's conked out, the battery possibly. I put some water in only it hasn't done the trick.

A.B.

Was it distilled water?

MISS SHEPHERD

It was holy water so it doesn't matter if it was distilled or not. The oil is another possibility.

A.B.

That's not holy too?

MISS SHEPHERD

Holy oil in a van? It would be far too expensive. I want pushing round the corner.

12b EXT. CONVENT. DAY

12b

A.B. starts to push. MISS SHEPHERD goes through her repertory of hand signals: 'I am moving off ... I am turning left' ... the movements done with boneless grace and in textbook Highway Code fashion.

A.B.

Are you wanting to go far?

MISS SHEPHERD

Possibly. I'm in two minds.

13 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

13

A police car passes. MISS SHEPHERD stops the van and crouches down. MISS SHEPHERD emerges cautiously.

A.B.

Is that it?

MISS SHEPHERD

I need the other end.

A.B.

That's half a mile away.

MISS SHEPHERD

I'm in dire need of assistance. I'm a sick woman, dying possibly, just looking for a last resting place, somewhere to lay my head. Do you know of anywhere?

A.B. goes

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Bye bye madam. Mind how you go.

14 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STUDY. DAY

14

A.B. is back in the study, empty except for the desk and boxes of books piled high, which he has started to unpack.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

A proper writer might welcome such an encounter as constituting experience. Me, I have to wait and mull it over.

ALAN BENNETT

She saw you coming.

A.B.

She's old.

ALAN BENNETT

You wouldn't get Harold Pinter pushing a van down the street.

A.B.

No. Unlike me. But then, I'm too busy not writing plays, and leading my mad, vigorous creative life.

ALAN BENNETT

Yeah. You live it. I write it.

15 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

15

MISS SHEPHERD'S POV inside the van driving slowly round the street, sussing it out.

As she passes no. 23 her POV: A.B. outside with his bike, with RUFUS and PAULINE, neighbours living opposite.

RUFUS

Pretty house, not as big as ours, of course; but you're unattached.

A.B.

No. It's attached to the house behind.

RUFUS

No, you. You're...single. Sickert once lived in the street, apparently; Dickens' abandoned wife. Now it's the usual north London medley: advertising, journalism, TV, people like you - writers, 'artists'. Anything in the pipeline?

A.B.

Well, I've got a play on in the West End.

RUFUS

Of course you have. Dare one ask?

A.B.
Thirteen five.

RUFUS
Oh my God!

A.B.
I know.

PAULINE
And we're twice as big, so what
does that make ours worth?

RUFUS
Mind you, our new neighbour won't
help the prices.

Shot of the van now parked at the top of the street.

A.B.
Yes, we've met.

RUFUS
Last year it was Gloucester Avenue.
Now it's our turn.

PAULINE
She seems to have settled at 66.

A.B.
Will they mind?

PAULINE
I hope not. We like to think we're
a community.

A.B. rides off on his bike.

PAULINE (CONT'D)
What play has he got on?

RUFUS
We saw it. That domestic thing.

PAULINE
(thinks, then shakes her
head)
Gone.

16 EXT. 42 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

16

Later. Plastic bags being hurled under the van by MISS SHEPHERD. Through the open window of No.42 we hear the sound of children playing *London's Burning* on their recorders, As this scene goes on, another small child arrives, lugging his cello home. FIONA PERRY comes out of the house.

FIONA
(to Miss Shepherd)
We thought you might like some
pears. They're from our garden in
Suffolk.

MISS SHEPHERD
Pears repeat on me.

She goes on hurling bags.

FIONA
Were you planning on staying long?

MISS SHEPHERD
Not with that din going on.

MISS SHEPHERD gets in the van, and closes the door. FIONA
goes back into her garden where her husband is waiting.

FIONA
I know what you're thinking.
Still, it's nice to feel we're
doing our bit for the homeless.

GILES PERRY, her husband, says nothing.

17 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STAIRS AND BEDROOM. DAY 17
A.B. showing a young ACTOR round. The house is nearly empty.

A.B.
I'd like to keep it like this.
Simple.

ACTOR
Monastic.

A.B.
Quite.
(moving into the bedroom)
This is my bedroom.

ACTOR
Nice.

A.B.
So do you like being in the play?

ACTOR
Love it. Love it. So English. Just
what people want. Bed looks
comfortable..

A.B.
Well maybe you could come round and
give me a hand with the decorating.

ACTOR

Sure. My girlfriend's a dab hand at the painting.

The ACTOR looks out of the window and sees MISS SHEPHERD pushing her wheelie past.

ACTOR (CONT'D)

On hello darling. You look a character.

A.B.

Well yes this is Camden Town.

During the course of the film the house should gradually fill up with stuff so that at the finish there's as much clutter (of a superior kind) as the van.

CUT TO:

18

EXT. CAMDEN HIGH STREET. DAY

18

A.B. gives sixpence to MISS SHEPHERD, who is sitting on the pavement which is covered with messages she has chalked up like 'St. Francis hurled money from him' and 'Say No to the Common Market'.

There is also a pile of pamphlets, one of which A.B. takes. She is just chalking in some rudimentary birds.

MISS SHEPHERD

Yes I'm here most days, I teach... and the pavement is my blackboard. I also sell pencils. A gentlemen came by the other day and said that the pencil he had bought from me was the best pencil on the market at the present time.

A.B.

(reading leaflet)

You're against the Common Market, I see.

MISS SHEPHERD

Me? Who said it was me?

A.B.

You're not the writer?

MISS SHEPHERD

Not necessarily. I'll go so far as to say this. They are anonymous. And they are a shilling. You've only given me sixpence.

A.B.

(pointing to the pavement)
It says there St Francis hurled
money from him.

MISS SHEPHERD

Yes, only he was a saint. He could
afford to.

PASSER-BY

(coming out of the bank
and tripping over her)
Sodding beggars.

MISS SHEPHERD

I am not a beggar. I am self-
employed. And this gentleman is my
neighbour.

20

EXT. 42 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

20

MISS SHEPHERD is putting her bags back in the van.

FIONA

Oh. On the move again? You didn't
stay long.

MISS SHEPHERD

No. Because it was non-stop music.

FIONA

Lucy is doing her O levels.

MISS SHEPHERD

It's the noise levels I'm worried
about.

She prepares to move off.

21

EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

21

RUFUS and PAULINE in evening dress, with a picnic hamper and
blankets, about to get into a cab. They wave to A.B.

RUFUS

Sorry about all this. Glyndebourne.

PAULINE

'Cosi'.

A.B.

Lucky you. Have fun.

As the cab goes up the street we see MISS SHEPHERD in her
van, doing her elaborate hand signals and slowly moving down
the Crescent.

RUFUS

Oh, look out. Madam's on the move.

PAULINE

So whose turn will it be now?

(To the cab driver.)

Slow down.

RUFUS

(looking at his watch)

We don't want to miss the curtain.

PAULINE

Mrs Vaughan Williams?

RUFUS

No. The Birts.

PAULINE

62?

Elaborate signing from MISS SHEPHERD that she is coming to a halt.

PAULINE (CONT'D)

No. No. No. Darling, that's us.

RUFUS

Stop the cab.

He runs back down the street.

RUFUS (CONT'D)

Sorry! You can't park here.

MISS SHEPHERD

I've had guidance this is where it should go.

RUFUS

Guidance? Who from?

MISS SHEPHERD

The Virgin Mary. I spoke to her yesterday. She was outside the post office in Parkway.

RUFUS

What does she know about parking?

PAULINE

(also having emerged from the cab)

Rufus! Tell her, we're going to Glyndebourne.

MISS SHEPHERD

I need a ruler. I must measure the distance between the tyres and the kerb. One and a half inches is the ideal gap. I came across that in a Catholic motoring magazine under tips on Christian parking.

RUFUS

This isn't Christian parking. It's a fucking liberty.

They head back up towards the cab.

They get back into the cab and drive off, some of this encounter having been seen by A.B.

22

EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

22

A.B. calls over to the van, now directly opposite his house.

A.B.

You didn't stay long outside 66.

MISS SHEPHERD comes over the road to A.B., worried.

MISS SHEPHERD

Not with all that din. They're not musical, are they?

A.B.

Who?

MISS SHEPHERD

61.

A.B.

No. Though they go to the opera. Are you alright?

MISS SHEPHERD

What with all this to-do, I think I'm about to be taken short. Can I use your lavatory?

She is already on her way into the house.

A.B.

No. The flush is on the blink.

MISS SHEPHERD

I don't mind.

She is in the house. We hear her calling 'Where is it? Where is it?' before the door bangs and we see A.B.'s agonised face?

23 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY 23

Later. The toilet flushes and MISS SHEPHERD comes out past him saying nothing. Furious, A.B. calls after her.

A.B.
'Thank you?'

She ignores him.

23b INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT - LAVATORY. DAY 23b

A.B. scrubs out the lavatory.

24 EXT. YORKSHIRE COTTAGE. DUSK 24

A.B.'s mother's cottage, in a village in the Yorkshire dales. Lights are on downstairs. We can see A.B.'s MAM through the window, on the phone.

A.B. (V.O.)
(On telephone)
I've got a meeting at the BBC.

MAM
What about?

A.B. (V.O.)
It's just something I'm writing.

MAM
I thought you were coming up.

A.B. (V.O.)
In a week or two.

25 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT/INT. YORKSHIRE COTTAGE. DUSK 25

A.B. on the phone to his mother. ALAN BENNETT at the desk.

MAM
I'm on my own.

A.B.
I know you're on your own.

ALAN BENNETT
We're all on our own.

MAM
Can I come down there for a bit? Is it a big house?

A.B.

Not really. You wouldn't like it.
Too many stairs.

MAM

They have these chair lift things
now.

(Pause)

Are you still there?

A.B.

Yes.

MAM

The foot feller came today.

A.B.

Who?

ALAN BENNETT begins to write this exchange down, sat at his
writing desk.

MAM

The foot feller.

A.B.

Do you mean the chiropodist?

MAM

You've written that down.

ALAN BENNETT

I haven't
(He has.)

MAM

I've given you some script. I'm
just raw material.

A.B.

No, you're not.
(Pause)

Mam.

26

EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

26

MRS. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS rides her bike down the Crescent. MISS
SHEPHERD has her door open, having just got up. She is
fanning herself with a fan she has picked up somewhere.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Are you alright?

MISS SHEPHERD

Yes. It's the van. Gets very close.

MRS. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
I imagine.

MISS SHEPHERD
You're tall.

MRS. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
My husband was tall. I'm Mrs.
Vaughan Williams. I won't shake
hands. Gardening.

MISS SHEPHERD
The composer? Greensleeves?

MRS. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Among other things. Why? Are you
musical? I don't even know your
name.

MISS SHEPHERD
It's Miss Shepherd, but I wouldn't
want it bandied about. I'm in an
incognito position, possibly.

MRS. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Safe with me.

27 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY.

27

Later. MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS talking to A.B. MISS SHEPHERD in
the background, sorting the plastic bags under the van.

MRS. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Shepherd. Drove ambulances in the
war, apparently.

A.B.
So where did she spring from?

MRS. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
And a nun once.

A.B.
A nun?

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
In the convent up the street.
Still, everybody's got something to
hide. My brother in law's a
policeman. That's Camden. People
wash up here. Like me. She'd be a
good subject.

A.B.
What for?

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
You. One of your little plays.
(She goes off saying -)
Remember! I planted the seed!

28 INT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STUDY. DAY

28

ALAN BENNETT is at the desk, his notebook open in front of him.

ALAN BENNETT
No, no. I'm writing about Mam half
the time as it is. One old lady's
enough.

A.B.
I live. You write. That's how it
works.

ALAN BENNETT
Except you don't much.

A.B.
Don't what?

ALAN BENNETT
Live. "Put yourself into what you
write." How? We're both so fucking
tame.

34 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

34

MISS SHEPHERD is clambering into the van when LOIS
approaches. In the van, a battered portable radio is tuned to
Radio 4.

LOIS
Miss Shepherd. I'm Lois, the social
worker.

MISS SHEPHERD
I don't want the social worker. I'm
about to listen to the repeat of
Any Answers.

LOIS
I've brought you some clothes. You
wrote asking for a coat.

MISS SHEPHERD
Not during Any Answers. I'm a busy
woman. I only asked for one coat.

LOIS
I brought three, in case you
fancied a change.

MISS SHEPHERD

Where am I supposed to put three coats? Besides, green isn't my colour.

She throws the green coat out the van on to the ground.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Have you got a stick?

LOIS

The council have that in hand. It's been precepted for.

MISS SHEPHERD

Will it be long enough?

LOIS

Yes. It's one of our special sticks.

MISS SHEPHERD

I don't want a special stick. I want an ordinary stick. Only longer. Shut the door.

LOIS

If I should want to get in touch with you whom should I call?

MISS SHEPHERD is closing the van doors.

MISS SHEPHERD

You can try Mr Bennett at 23 only don't take any notice of what he says. He's a communist, possibly.

A.B.

Have you tried the people opposite, they're nearer?

CUT TO:

35

EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

35

A.B. on doorstep of 23 Gloucester Crescent.

A.B.

Have you tried the people opposite, they're nearer?

LOIS

They said they don't relate to her. You were the one she related to.

A.B.

Is that what they said, 'related to'?

LOIS

No. That's me. They said you were her pal. She was your girlfriend.

A.B.

Jesus.

LOIS

Does she use your lavatory?

A.B.

Only in an emergency.

LOIS

That might give her squatter's rights. We'd be much happier if she moved on.

A.B.

We?

LOIS

Camden.

36 EXT. CAMDEN HIGH STREET. DAY

36

Later. MISS SHEPHERD watches TV though Curry's window: Edward Heath arriving in Downing Street 1970.

A.B. arrives with her shopping.

A.B.

I've got everything - sherbet lemons, Cup-a-Soup, the miniature whisky.

MISS SHEPHERD

That's medicinal.

They walk together up the High Street, MISS SHEPHERD pushing her child's push-chair.

A.B.

She seemed very understanding, the social worker.

MISS SHEPHERD

Not understanding enough. I ask for a wheelchair and what does she get me? A walking stick.

(and she looks at him
meaningfully)

(MORE)

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

And she says I don't get an allowance unless I get an address.

A.B.

'The Van, Gloucester Crescent' - isn't that an address?

MISS SHEPHERD

No it needs to be a house. A residence. Still, I may be going away soon, possibly.

A.B.

How long for?

MISS SHEPHERD

Broadstairs, possibly.

A.B.

Why Broadstairs? Have you family there?

MISS SHEPHERD

No. NO.

A.B.

Have you got any family?

MISS SHEPHERD

I just need the air.

CUT TO:

36a EXT. INVERNESS STREET MARKET. DAY

36a

MISS SHEPHERD

I saw a snake this afternoon. It was coming up Parkway. It was a long grey snake. It was a boa constrictor, possibly.

A.B.

No...

MISS SHEPHERD

It looked poisonous. It was keeping close to the wall. I have a feeling it may have been heading for the van.

A.B.

No, Miss Shepherd...

MISS SHEPHERD

I thought I'd better warn you just to be on the safe side. I've had some close shaves with snakes.

A.B.

Listen to me Miss Shepherd. There are no boa constrictors in Camden Town.

MISS SHEPHERD

Are you calling me a liar? I know a boa constrictor when I see one.

Pitying smile from A.B. A street trader calls over.

STREET TRADER

All right, my love? You're looking especially lovely today, sweetheart.

MISS SHEPHERD

Don't sweetheart me. I'm a sick woman. Dying possibly.

STREET TRADER

Well chin up love, we all got to go some time. Smells like you already have.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

I do not believe in the snake, still less that it was en route for the van.

CUT TO

37 EXT. 42 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

37

The PERRY CHILDREN playing in their garden. Piercing scream. Fiona comes up.

CHILD (SAM)

Mummy! Mummy! There's a snake!

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Only next day I find there has been a break in at the local pet shop, so there may have been a snake on the run...

A boa constrictor slithers through the flower bed.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

So of course I feel guilty.

The CHILDREN and FIONA run into the house shouting 'A snake! A snake!'

CUT TO:

37b INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY. 37b

Alan Bennett sits at his desk, writing.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
A real writer would have asked her
about her close shaves with snakes.

Only she seems to have cleared off.

39 EXT. BROADSTAIRS ESPLANADE. DAY 39

A bus pulls in. MISS SHEPHERD gets out.

40 EXT. BROADSTAIRS STREET. DAY 40

A POLICEMAN has stopped MISS SHEPHERD, who is in her usual long skirt etc.

MISS SHEPHERD
A nightie? This isn't a night
dress. This style can't have got to
Broadstairs yet. And I know the
law. You can't be arrested for
wearing a nightie.

POLICEMAN
What're you doing in Broadstairs?

MISS SHEPHERD
I am minding my own business!

40a EXT. BROADSTAIRS RESIDENTIAL ROAD. DAY. 40a

MISS SHEPHERD is on her way up the hill.

41 EXT. BROADSTAIRS HOUSING ESTATE. DAY 41

A suburban housing estate of modest bungalows, backing onto fields.

MISS SHEPHERD approaches the end bungalow warily. She rings the bell. A solid, respectable man (MR FAIRCHILD) opens the door. He looks anxiously over his shoulder, shuts the door behind him, and takes MISS SHEPHERD down the side of the house towards the garden shed.

43 EXT. YORKSHIRE COTTAGE. DAY 43

MAM is at the back-door.

MAM
Alan! Come out here.

A.B.
(inside)
What for?

MAM
There's some massive birds on the wall.

A.B.
There never are. There's nothing on the wall. You're imagining things.

MAM
There are.

A.B. comes to the door. There are four peacocks on the garden wall.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
And there were, lined up on the garden wall, four peacocks from the Hall. So, boa constrictors in the street, peacocks on the wall, it seems that both at the northern and southern gates of my life stands a deluded woman.

44 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, STUDY. DAY

44

A.B. is back from Yorkshire. ALAN BENNETT is at the desk.

A.B.
Except you just said they aren't.

ALAN BENNETT
Aren't what?

A.B.
Deluded.

ALAN BENNETT
Well, not in this particular instance.

A.B.
And they're not the same Alan, Mam and Miss Shepherd.

ALAN BENNETT
No, Alan, they are not. But they are both old ladies. That appears to be my niche, apparently.
(MORE)

ALAN BENNETT (CONT'D)

And whereas my contemporaries lovingly chronicle their first tentative investigations of the opposite sex, or their adventures in the world of journalism, I'm stuck with old ladies.

He throws his notebook at A.B.

ALAN BENNETT (CONT'D)

All right - I am keeping a sodding notebook, but only on the off-chance. She's not a project. She's not in the pipeline. I don't want to write about her. She's just something that's happening.

A.B.

So what do you want to write about?

ALAN BENNETT

I want to write about spies.

A.B.

Spies?

ALAN BENNETT

There you are, you see. You think that's barmy. Spies. Russia. I can't always be writing about the North.

(mimicking himself)

'I was born and brought up in Leeds where my father was a butcher, and as a boy I would often go out on the bike with the orders.' It's not Proust. It's not even J.B. Priestley.

45 INT./EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. BATHROOM. DAY

45

A.B. in bathroom brushing his teeth watches: PAULINE takes delivery of a carpet or other upmarket item.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

The houses in the crescent were built as villas for the Victorian middle class and their basements are now being enlarged by couples who are liberal in outlook but not easy with their new found prosperity.

Meanwhile, RUFUS leaves home for work with his briefcase etc, passes MISS SHEPHERD who is struggling to unscrew a bottle top.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Guilt, in a word, which means that in varying degrees they tolerate Miss Shepherd, their consciences absolved by her presence.

He stops and with an ill grace turns back and puts his hand out for the bottle. He unscrews it and hands it back. All done slightly furtively lest anyone observe his good turn.

47 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

47

Snow. The two youngest PERRY CHILDREN come with FIONA and a reluctant GILES and knock on the van door. They have Christmas presents for MISS SHEPHERD.

PERRY FAMILY

Merry Christmas!

She takes the presents.

MISS SHEPHERD

Shut the door. Shut the door! I'm a busy woman.

They close the van door.

46 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

46

PAULINE approaches the van with a plate of leftovers, mouthing "creme brûlée".

MISS SHEPHERD takes it gracelessly.

CUT TO:

30 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. KITCHEN. DAY

30

A.B. and an INTERVIEWER (American) sit at the kitchen table with a tape recorder.

INTERVIEWER

What was your first play about?

A.B.

Public school - which, more accurately, is what you Americans call private school.

INTERVIEWER

But you didn't go to public school.

A.B.

No, but I read about it.

INTERVIEWER

And what was your next play about?

A.B.

Sex. I read about that too.

29 EXT. 42 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

29

The PERRY CHILDREN are giving a concert on the pavement, a cap for contributions. MISS SHEPHERD strides up the street.

MISS SHEPHERD

Stop it! Stop it! Stop it this minute! Stop it!

The children flee. GILES comes out of the house.

GILES

Do you have a problem?

MISS SHEPHERD

They were making a noise.

GILES

They're children.

MISS SHEPHERD

I am a sick woman.

GILES

You certainly are.

A car beeps its horn to get MISS SHEPHERD out of the road.

50/51 EXT./INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

50/51

MISS SHEPHERD ringing the bell. A.B. opens the door.

MISS SHEPHERD

Mr Bennett. I've worked out a way of getting on the wireless.

A.B.

What?

MISS SHEPHERD

I want to do one of those phone-in programmes. It's something someone like you could get put on in a jiffy.

She pushes past him and goes into the study. A.B. gets in front of her and manages to get some paper on the seat before she sits down. (There is a TV in the corner of the study.)

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

I could be called the Lady Behind the Curtain. Or A Woman of Britain, you see. You could take a nom de plume view of it. I see the curtain as being here, possibly. Some greeny material would do.

A.B.

I thought this was a phone-in.

MISS SHEPHERD

Well?

A.B.

It's the radio. There's no need for a curtain at all.

MISS SHEPHERD

Yes, well we can iron out these hiccups when the time comes. And if I come in I could catch up with some civilisation.

A.B.

Civilisation, what you mean the television?

MISS SHEPHERD

Wild life. Famines. Sheep dog trials, possibly. I watch it in Curry's window but it's not ideal.

A look between A.B. And ALAN BENNETT, who is at the desk.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Je crois que vous passez les vacances en France.

A.B.

Yes. Er, oui.

MISS SHEPHERD

J'ai étudié en France il y a trente-cinq ans.

A.B.

Avant la guerre?

MISS SHEPHERD

What guerre?

A.B.

La guerre mondiale numéro deux.

MISS SHEPHERD

Oui. La deuxieme guerre mondiale.

A.B.

Qu'est ce que vous étudiez?

MISS SHEPHERD

I was studying incognito à Paris.

A.B.

But what? What were you studying?

MISS SHEPHERD

Music. The pianoforte, possibly.
Have you got an old pan scrub? I'm
thinking of painting the van. One
of those little mop things they use
to wash dishes with would do.

She heads off down the corridor.

A.B.

How about a brush?

MISS SHEPHERD

I've got a brush. It's just for the
first coat.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

OK, she's been a nun. Only now it
turns out she's been a musician
besides, and seemingly with fluent
French.

CUT TO:

53 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

53

Later. MISS SHEPHERD is painting the van.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

She's certainly no painter. Because
today, rain notwithstanding, she
moves slowly round her mobile home,
thoughtfully touching up the rust
patches, with crushed mimosa always
a favourite shade.

FIONA passes with a CHILD.

CHILD

She's using the wrong paint. Cars
have special paint.

MISS SHEPHERD

(viciously)

Not this one. It's Catholic paint.

The CHILD is dragged away.

CHILD

And she smells.

FIONA

That's because she's poor. You'd smell if we were poor.

They pass MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS on the corner of Gloucester Crescent. MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS stands next to A.B.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

(looking at the van)

Oh...

MISS SHEPHERD

Telling me about paint. I was in the infants' school. I won a prize for painting.

A.B.

But it's all lumps. You've got to mix it.

MISS SHEPHERD

I have mixed it, only I've got some Madeira cake in it.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Cake or no cake, all Miss Shepherd's vehicles ended up looking as if they'd been given a coat of badly made custard or plastered with scrambled eggs.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Divine!

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Still, there were few occasions on which one saw her genuinely happy and one of these was when she was putting paint on.

MRS VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS

Jackson Pollock himself could not have done it better. Even with a pan scrub.

An altercation across the street. An official is trying to post a removal order on the windscreen.

A.B. looks up the crescent where council workers are painting yellow lines.

A.B.

Yellow lines.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Sorry?

A.B.

Parking restrictions.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Oh what a bore.

A.B.

She'll be illegally parked. She'll have to move on.

MISS SHEPHERD is crossing the road with a removal order.

54

INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. KITCHEN. DAY

54

A.B. studies the form MISS SHEPHERD has brought over.

A.B.

It's a removal order.

MISS SHEPHERD

I know it's a removal order.

A.B.

It means you'll have to drive on somewhere else.

MISS SHEPHERD

But I'm disabled. I don't always use a walking stick and that pulls the wool over people's eyes. But I am a bona fide resident of Camden and I had rheumatic fever as a child. And mumps.

A.B.

I still think you'll have to move on. Go somewhere else.

MISS SHEPHERD

Well it won't move. There's not enough juice.

A.B.

Well I'll get you some up the road.

MISS SHEPHERD

I don't like their petrol. It could go, it just needs a bit of coaxing. What I'm worried about particularly are the wheels. They're under divine protection. If I do get this other vehicle I'd like the wheels transferred.

A.B.

What other vehicle?

MISS SHEPHERD

They may be miraculous, the tyres.
They've only had to be pumped up
once since 1964.

A.B.

What 'other vehicle'?

MISS SHEPHERD

They only cost me a fiver.

A.B.

Miss Shepherd, you said about
another vehicle.

MISS SHEPHERD

A van.

A.B.

Another van?

MISS SHEPHERD

A newer model. A titled Catholic
lady says she may get me one as an
act of charity. It's Lady Wiggin
only she'd prefer to remain
anonymous.

A.B.

I bet she would. So why don't you
park it outside her house?

55

EXT. 12 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. LADY WIGGIN'S HOUSE. DAY

55

A.B. at Lady Wiggin's front door.

LADY WIGGIN

It's out of the question.

A.B.

There's plenty of room.

LADY WIGGIN

I have neighbours.

A.B.

So have I.

LADY WIGGIN

So should I not buy her another
van?

A.B.
(under his breath)
Please your fucking self.

LADY WIGGIN
What?

56 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY.

56

A.B. returning to the house. MISS SHEPHERD calls him over.

MISS SHEPHERD
Mr Bennett...The ideal solution
would be off-street parking. You
know a driveway, possibly.

A.B.
So what are you going to do?

MISS SHEPHERD
Play it by ear.

59 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. NIGHT

59

A man in his mid sixties (UNDERWOOD), tall and sinister,
approaches the van.

UNDERWOOD
Lady.
(tapping lightly on the
side of the van.)
Are you there.

Her side window is open a little and he slips his fingers
inside.

UNDERWOOD (CONT'D)
Is this a bad moment? Have you got
something for me?

MISS SHEPHERD (unseen) bangs his fingers with a hammer or a
brick.

UNDERWOOD (CONT'D)
You bad bitch! You dirty lying
bitch!

He gives the van a great bang. A.B. opens the bathroom window
and calls across the road.

A.B.
Can I help you?

UNDERWOOD

Good evening to you, sir. Finding myself in the vicinity, I am taking this opportunity to pay my compliments to Margaret.

A.B.

Margaret?

UNDERWOOD

An old friend from way back. I've been out of the game for a while...you know how it is.

A.B.

You mean Miss Shepherd.

UNDERWOOD

Shepherd, is it? Very good.

A.B.

She'll be asleep

UNDERWOOD

Of course. I will bid you good night, sir. I will call again when my schedule permits.

A.B. goes inside. UNDERWOOD lingers, and taps lightly on the van. Two £20 notes are slid through the window. He taps again. Then another £20 note.

UNDERWOOD (CONT'D)

Thank you..

- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 61 | INT. VAN. EARLY MORNING | 61 |
| | MISS SHEPHERD being shaken around - a fairly frightening scene. | |
| 62 | INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, STUDY. EARLY MORNING | 62 |
| | A.B. looks out of the window and sees a commotion outside. | |
| 60 | EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. EARLY MORNING | 60 |
| | A workman's van, with two young men in their twenties, who get either side of the van and start shaking it and shouting at MISS SHEPHERD. | |
| 63 | EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. EARLY MORNING | 63 |
| | A.B., comes out as - jeering - the two guys drive off. | |

A.B. Approaches the back of the van.

A.B.
Miss Shepherd.

No answer.

A.B. (CONT'D)
Miss Shepherd. Are you alright?

MISS SHEPHERD
(from within the van)
I think so. What was it about? It
wasn't the police, was it?

A.B.
No. They were louts. But if you
choose to live like this it's what
you must expect.

MISS SHEPHERD
I didn't choose. I was chosen.

64 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, STUDY. DAY

64

A.B. is still in his dressing gown.

A.B.
Well that settles it.

ALAN BENNETT
You think?

A.B.
I can't always be looking out for
her. I'm not her keeper. I mean,
what happens to work? I think she
should either go...or...

ALAN BENNETT
Or what?

A.B.
Or bring the van into the drive
where we can forget about her.
Actually, that's why some men
marry...so they don't have to think
any more about their wives.

ALAN BENNETT
That's not bad.
(He is writing it down)

A.B.

Yes. Except it's Proust.
And it'll only be for a few months
until she decides where she's
going. It'll be easier. But it's
not kindness.

ALAN BENNETT

No.

(He reads from one of his
notebooks)

'Good nature, or what is often
considered as such, is the most
selfish of all virtues: it is nine
times out of ten mere indolence of
disposition.'

A.B.

That's not you?

ALAN BENNETT

Hazlitt. And it's will. Pure will.
She's known what she's wanted all
along.

74

INT. OUR LADY OF HAL R.C. CHURCH, CAMDEN. DAY

74

MISS SHEPHERD is in the confessional with someone on the
outside waiting his turn.

MISS SHEPHERD

The soul in question did confess,
though in guarded terms, in Rome,
in Holy Year, though I'm not sure
the priest understood English. Do I
look like a joy rider?

PRIEST

(patiently)

My child. You have already been
given absolution for this
particular sin. I have given you it
myself on several occasions. Have
faith. Absolution is not like a bus
pass. It does not run out.

We see MISS SHEPHERD come out of the box as the next person
take her place and recoils.

MAN

Christ.

PRIEST

(from behind the grille)

There is air freshener behind the
virgin.

The man picks up a can of air freshener.

65 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. KITCHEN. NIGHT

65

A dinner party in progress: the neighbours and Donald, a young actor, discuss A.B. who is currently not in the room.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
He's a saint. Ralph was the same.
Some people are just kind.

RUFUS
Kind? This is London, Ursula.
Nobody is kind.

GILES
And now the old cow's got a foot in
the door. He's a fool.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Who else would do it?

PAULINE
Well, we might... it's just the
girls...

DONALD
I'm just an unemployed actor and I
don't know the lady but can I ask
something? What makes her Alan's
problem?

A silence.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Darling. She is a human being.

RUFUS
Only just.

FIONA
(to Donald)
Changing the subject. When are we
going to find Alan a girl?

Silence. GILES rolls his eyes. FIONA tries again.

FIONA (CONT'D)
Josephine's pregnant again.

DONALD
Oh no! Actually, I'm just trying to
think who Josephine is.

FIONA
The hamster.

A.B. returns carrying a fresh bottle of wine.

A.B.
Here we are.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
We were just saying how grateful
she'll be.

66 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

66

At the van.

MISS SHEPHERD
Put the van in your drive? That
hadn't occurred to me. I don't
know. It might not be convenient.

A.B.
No. I've thought it over. Believe
me, Miss Shepherd. It's all right.
Just till you sort yourself out.

MISS SHEPHERD
Not convenient for you. Convenient
for me. You're not doing me a
favour, you know. I have got other
fish to fry. A man on the pavement
told me if I went south of the
river I'd be welcomed with open
arms.

A.B. watches her as she goes back to the van and starts to
sort through her clothes.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
I was about to do her a good turn
but, as ever, it was not without
thoughts of strangulation. She
would come into the garden,
yes...but only as favour to me.

68 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

68

MISS SHEPHERD walks round the old van for the last time. On
the broken windscreen she paints a cross. Her belongings have
been piled on the pavement outside No. 23.

We see the council truck towing away the now empty van as the
new (though second-hand) van driven by MISS SHEPHERD with the
usual battery of hand signals comes down the Crescent.

ALAN BENNETT watches from the study window. The neighbours
watch from the street.

Van being slowly driven into drive, comes to a stop (almost).

A.B.

Have you put on the handbrake?

MISS SHEPHERD

I am about to do so.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Whereupon she applies the handbrake with such determination that, like Excalibur, it can never afterwards be released.

69 INT/EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STUDY. NIGHT

69

A.B. coming into the study, and going to the living room window. Behind him, a young man comes in, pulling on a shirt or T-shirt. He has a small overnight bag. A.B.'s POV of the van, MISS SHEPHERD inside praying, her paraffin light on.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Now she is on the premises, I sometimes get a glimpse of Miss Shepherd praying and it is seldom a tranquil or a meditative process, the fervour of her intercessions rocking her to and fro. What is it she's wanting forgiveness for? I used to pray myself when I was young. But never like this. I'd never done anything. But what has she done?

70 INT. VAN. NIGHT

70

Inside the van, MISS SHEPHERD prays, a reproduction Assumption of the Virgin among her possessions.

MISS SHEPHERD

O Virgo Fidelis, first leader of all creatures, intercede on my behalf. I hunger and thirst for the fulfilment of a just era and utterly trust in possible light received.

71 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STUDY. NIGHT

71

A.B. turns back to the young man on the sofa.

YOUNG MAN

Who's the old bat?

A.B.

Oh, she's....a friend.

YOUNG MAN

A friend?

A.B.

Someone I know.

YOUNG MAN

Weird.

A.B.

Maybe.

YOUNG MAN

Actually I think I better be off.

A.B.

Yeah? You don't want to stay for coffee or anything?

YOUNG MAN

Nah.

72 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. NIGHT

72

From Miss Shepherd's POV we see A.B. saying goodbye to the YOUNG MAN leaving. The YOUNG MAN waves at the gate.

A.B. Is about to go back inside when MISS SHEPHERD'S hand comes through the window of the van.

MISS SHEPHERD

Mr Bennett. That young man. Did he have an earring?

A.B.

He did.

MISS SHEPHERD

You want to be careful.

CUT TO:

75 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. KITCHEN. DAY

75

MAM and A.B. having tea, preparing to leave.

MAM

She'll be wanting to move in next.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O)

Said my mother, who has been in London on a state visit.

MAM

Why didn't you tell me she was in the drive?

A.B.

I forgot.

MAM

I got a whiff of her when I first came. A right nasty bad dishcloth smell. Well, she's in the garden. Next it'll be the house. What will folks think?

A.B.

This is London. Nobody thinks anything.

MAM

It's with her being a nun, not having got off. They get thwarted. An educated woman and living like that. Mind you, you're going down the same road.

A.B.

Me?

MAM

No cloth on the table. No holder for the toilet roll. Given time I could have this place spotless.

A.B.

You've got a home. You wouldn't want to live here.

MAM looks at A.B. It is plain she would like to do just that.

76

INT/EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, STAIRS/HALL. DAY

76

They are climbing the stairs to the hall.

MAM

Where does she go to the lav?

A.B.

It's something to do with plastic bags.

MAM

What sort of plastic bags?

A.B.

Stout ones, I hope. You've not met her, do you want to?

MAM

No. With her being educated I wouldn't know what to say.

A.B. opening the door, the van visible in the doorway. A cab waiting.

MAM (CONT'D)

Give us a kiss. When will you be coming up next?

A.B.

Soon.

MAM

The thing is, I keep seeing a car in the car park.

A.B.

That's slightly to be expected, isn't it?

MAM

At night. Watching.

A.B.

Are you taking your tablets?

MAM

When I remember.

She looks out at the van, and MISS SHEPHERD going about her business.

MAM (CONT'D)

She should be in a home. Where does she go to the lav?

A.B.

I told you.

MAM

Looked after. A place where they'll wash her and make her presentable. I'm surprised they let her roam the streets.

Mam walks to the back of the van where MISS SHEPHERD is sitting.

MAM (CONT'D)

Good morning.

No response from Miss Shepard.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

It's like a fairy story. A Parable, in which the guilty is gulled in to devising a sentence for someone innocent only to find it is their own doom they have pronounced.

(MORE)

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Because my mother is much closer to
being put in a home than Miss
Shepherd

Mam gets into the taxi.

A.B.
(to Mam)
You got your purse?

MAM
Yes...I do miss your Dad. Give us a
kiss. I asked our Gordon when he
was a pilot did he go behind the
clouds?

A.B.
And did he?

MAM
I can't remember. He's a love,
though. I know that.

CUT TO:

78a	EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY	78a
	MISS SHEPHERD paints the new van yellow.	
78b	EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY	78b
	Later, she festoons the van with Union Jacks and other silver jubilee paraphernalia.	
81	EXT. YORKSHIRE COTTAGE. DAY	81
	MAM arrives at the front door with her shopping, alone.	
82	INT. VAN. DAY	82
	Two Jehovah's Witnesses come up the drive and ring the front door bell. A.B. comes to the door.	
	JEHOVAH'S WITNESS Good afternoon. Does Jesus Christ dwell in this house?	
	A.B. No. Try the van.	
98	EXT. CAMDEN HIGH STREET. DAY	98
	MISS SHEPHERD at Curry's window watching Mrs Thatcher on TV.	

80 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY 80

Miss Shepherd arrives home with an old TV in her push chair.

Later: A.B. running an electric cable from the house to the van.

86 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. NIGHT 86

A.B. watches as another young man leaves the house. The young man looks into the van where MISS SHEPHERD is watching news coverage of the Falklands War. She sees him peering in.

MISS SHEPHERD
(in the van)
Clear off, you nosey blighter!

90 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY 90

They come round the corner of Inverness Street and reach no. 23. MISS SHEPHERD goes towards the van.

MISS SHEPHERD
Mr Bennett.

A.B.
Yes?

MISS SHEPHERD
These men. Who come late at night.
I know what they are.

A.B.
(under his breath)
Jesus.

MISS SHEPHERD
They're communists. Else why would
they come at night?

104 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, GARDEN. DUSK. 104

MISS SHEPHERD in the van watching television.

UNDERWOOD comes into the drive and taps on the van.

UNDERWOOD
(calling, menacingly)
I like the new vehicle. Not a mark
on it.
(giving the van a great
bang)
Not a bloody scratch. What's your
name now, Margaret?

MISS SHEPHERD
(from van)
My name's Mary. Go away.

UNDERWOOD
Mary is it now? Mary what?

Pause.

UNDERWOOD (CONT'D)
Mary what?

He gives a great bang on the side of the van.

MISS SHEPHERD
I'll call the police.

UNDERWOOD pulls the van door open. She is cowering inside.

UNDERWOOD
Call the police? I don't think you will, you two-faced pisshole. Because calling the police is just what you didn't do. Apropos of which I think another contribution is due.

Front door opens and A.B. comes out

A.B.
Can I help you? What's all this din?

UNDERWOOD
No din, sir. Margaret and I were just taking a stroll down memory lane.

MISS SHEPHERD
Don't Margaret me. That name is buried to sin.

A.B.
You came before.

UNDERWOOD
Of course, this isn't *the* van, is it?

A.B.
She had another one.

UNDERWOOD
That is kind of you. A homeless woman. A thankless soul and not over-salubrious. Goodbye Margaret.

Beat.

A.B.

I thought you said your name was Mary.

MISS SHEPHERD

It is.

A.B.

Why does he call you Margaret?

MISS SHEPHERD

He's taken too much to drink, on an empty stomach, possibly.

A.B.

It is your name: Mary Shepherd?

MISS SHEPHERD

Subject to the Roman Catholic Church in her rights and to amendment, yes.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

It's obviously not her name, and though it's long enough since she drove the van into the garden, I'm still too polite to ask who she is; let alone what this fellow wants who materialises at regular intervals and comes braying on the side of the van. Music has something to do with it..

CUT TO:

105 INT/EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, STUDY. NIGHT

105

ALAN BENNETT at the desk. Both looking out towards the van. The doors at the back are still open.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But is it just the noise, or music itself?

A.B. puts some music on.

Through the window they watch MISS SHEPHERD come out of the van and hurry to the front door.

MISS SHEPHERD

(shouting)

I can hear the music. I can hear it. Why must you play that? I can hear it!

A.B. goes to the door.

106

INT./EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. NIGHT

106

MISS SHEPHERD at the door. The music still playing.

A.B.

How can you dislike music? You used to play the piano.

MISS SHEPHERD

How do you know that?

A.B.

You told me.

MISS SHEPHERD

I didn't say I didn't like it. I don't want to hear it, that's all.

A.B. returns to the study.

ALAN BENNETT

Should she speak now? Should she explain?

A.B.

She never lets on. Never explains.

ALAN BENNETT

Well maybe she should.

MISS SHEPHERD

I was once left alone in a room in the convent.

107

INT. CONVENT. DAY

107

We see YOUNG MISS SHEPHERD, a novice.

MISS SHEPHERD (V.O.)

They didn't leave novices alone normally. And there was a piano there. I tried it and it was open.

YOUNG MISS SHEPHERD starts to play. An OLD NUN comes in quietly.

MISS SHEPHERD (V.O.)

It needed tuning and some of the notes were dead but it sounded more beautiful to me than any of the pianos I'd ever played. Then suddenly the mistress of the novices came in ... crept in possibly, because I didn't hear her. She said:

MISTRESS slams the piano cover.

108 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. NIGHT 108

MISS SHEPHERD

That was what God wanted. And that
I'd been told before. I said -

Couldn't I just play some hymns for
us to sing to? She said that was
arguing, and I'd never make a nun
if I argued.

109 EXT. OLD PEOPLES HOME. DAY 109

An Old Peoples Home overlooking the sea at Weston Super Mare.
A.B. arrives in a taxi.

110 EXT. OLD PEOPLES HOME. DAY 110

A.B. sitting beside his MOTHER, on a bench in the garden.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So with painful symmetry my mother
ends up in a home in Western Super
Mare, while her derelict
counterpart now resides in my
garden. Putting my mother in a home
I see as some sort of failure. And
giving the other a home, that's a
failure too.

114 INT/EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. BATHROOM. DAY 114

A.B. is upstairs. There is a distant sound getting nearer all
the time. Suddenly (and possibly with a bang) we see through
the window a three-wheeler Robin Reliant draw up.

A.B.

Oh Jesus. She's got herself a three
wheeler.

115 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY. 115

A.B. walking round the Reliant now parked outside the house.
ALAN BENNETT watching from the window.

A.B.

Where will you park it?

MISS SHEPHERD

In the residents' parking.

A.B.

You haven't got a permit.

MISS SHEPHERD

I have. I got one yesterday.

A.B.

You never told me.

MISS SHEPHERD

You'd only have raised objections if I had.

A.B.

Have you insured it?

MISS SHEPHERD

I don't need insuring. It's like the van. I'm insured in heaven.

A.B.

So who pays if you have an accident? The Pope?

MISS SHEPHERD

I shan't have an accident.

A.B.

What if you run into something?

MISS SHEPHERD

I shan't run into anything. I'm an experienced driver. I drove ambulances in the blackout.

A.B.

What if someone runs into you?

Pause.

A.B. (CONT'D)

Miss Shepherd. What if someone runs into you?

MISS SHEPHERD

(fiercely)

You have no business saying that.

Pause.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Why do you say that? No one is going to run into me.

Pause.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Where's the key?

A.B.

What key?

MISS SHEPHERD

The car key. I put it down.

A.B.

I haven't got it.

MISS SHEPHERD

You have. You've taken it.

A.B.

I have not.

MISS SHEPHERD

You're lying. You don't want me to have the car so you've taken the key.

A.B.

Don't shout.

MISS SHEPHERD

I have to shout because of your ignorance. People coming and going all hours of the day and night, I'd be better off in a ditch. Give me the key.

A.B.

I haven't got your sodding key. What's that round your neck? This. This.

(He pushes her and she falls against the car.)

The key. The sodding key.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS comes past.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Having fun?

A.B.

(Beat)

Shouldn't you say sorry?

MISS SHEPHERD

I've no time for sorry. Sorry is for God.

A.B. and MISS SHEPHERD slowly recover, he watching her retreat into the van. ALAN BENNETT is at the desk.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

This was the only time I ever touched her. It was not because she was calling me a liar, but because she seemed mad. It was my mother.

A.B.
(calling through the study
window to ALAN BENNETT)
It's always Mam you compare her
with. They are not the same. I
don't like them even sharing the
same sentence.

117 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY.

117

A.B. watching at the window.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
These days it's almost as if we're
married.

MISS SHEPHERD is painting the Reliant.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
'How's your old lady?', they say.
Which is what people call a wife:
your Old Lady.

113 INT. LYTTTELTON THEATRE. NIGHT

113

A.B. sitting in the stalls during a technical rehearsal with
the director of his new play.

DIRECTOR
How's your old lady?

A.B.
She's still there. I'm still here.

DIRECTOR
Your mother died, didn't she?

A.B.
No. She's still here too. She was
in hospital, but now she's in a
home. Except she's not all there,
you know. She's not anywhere.

DIRECTOR
Should we make that plain in the
play?

A.B.
No. That's classified information.

CUT TO:

117 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY.

117

A.B. watching at the window. MISS SHEPHERD is painting the Reliant.

ALAN BENNETT

Years ago Mam wanted Miss Shepherd put in a home, but she's still on the loose. Of course, whether she's all there or not is anyone's guess.

She turns towards him and calls through the window. She is splattered with yellow paint.

MISS SHEPHERD

Mr Bennett. I don't like the three-wheeler standing in the street. If you pushed the van in front of your window I could get the Reliant in there on the drive. There's tons of room.

A.B.

So I have the van and the Reliant?

MISS SHEPHERD

I've had guidance that's where it should be. In terms of vandals.

A.B.

Guidance from whom?

MISS SHEPHERD

I'm not at liberty to speak. I think I may contact my new social worker.

A.B.

What for? You always say you don't want the social worker.

MISS SHEPHERD

(Returns to painting the Reliant)

I've had guidance she might help.

118 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT STUDY. DAY

118

A.B. now with the new social worker, MISS BRISCOE.

A.B.

I don't want a used car lot.

MISS BRISCOE

Mary says...

A.B.

Mary who?

MISS BRISCOE

Mary, your Lady in the Van. Didn't you know her name was Mary?

A.B.

I suppose I did. I always call her Miss Shepherd.

MISS BRISCOE

We all have names. Perhaps if you called her by her name and she called you by yours? Alan, Mary...You never know, it might be easier to talk things through.

A.B.

Through? There is no through. How do you talk things through with someone who has conversations with the Virgin Mary? You talk things through with Isaiah Berlin, maybe, who in comparison with Miss Shepherd is a man of few words, but you do not talk things through with her because you don't get through.

MISS BRISCOE

Alan. I'm getting a bit of hostility here. I realise for you this may be a steep learning curve...

A.B.

No. It is not a steep learning curve. I have never been on a so called learning curve. I'm about as likely to be found on a learning curve as I am on the ski slopes at Zermatt. And besides, her name isn't Mary.

MISS BRISCOE

Oh?

A.B.

Some people seem to think it's Margaret. And it isn't even Shepherd.

MISS BRISCOE

I have her down as Mary.

A.B.

Yes, and you presumably have her down as a rational human being.

- 125 EXT. BROADSTAIRS. DAY 125
The Reliant pulls up and parks on the front. MISS SHEPHERD gets out.
- 119 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY 119
A.B. comes out with some rubbish. He sees a small brown turd on the side of the bin.
- 125a EXT. BROADSTAIRS. DAY 125a
Later: MISS SHEPHERD on the beach eating chips from newspaper.
- 119a EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY 119a
A.B. has plastic bags over his hands as he begins to remove the turd from the bin.
- 125b EXT. BROADSTAIRS. DAY 125b
Then: she sits on a children's carousel, as it revolves carrying her and two or three small children.
- 126 INT. BROADSTAIRS ICE CREAM PARLOUR. DAY 126
MISS SHEPHERD is served with a large ice cream sundae.
- 127 EXT. CHURCH HALL, ON A ROAD NEAR THE SEAFRONT. DAY - 127
A sign saying 'SENIOR CITIZENS CLUB. TEA, COFFEE AND CAKE. ALL WELCOME'
MISS SHEPHERD goes in.
- 128 INT. CHURCH HALL. DAY 128
A gathering of pensioners. A young woman is about to play the piano.
MISS SHEPHERD is at the back helping herself to tea and biscuits. She hasn't noticed the pianist. Then the woman plays - Chopin, say. MISS SHEPHERD is about to flee, hesitates, then stays and listens, transported.
- 130 EXT. BROADSTAIRS HOUSING ESTATE. DAY 130
We see the Reliant Robin slide into view and park not far from the end bungalow, and wait.

A woman (EDITH) comes out with a shopping bag. MISS SHEPHERD crouches down.

131 INT. GARDEN SHED. DAY 131

We see MISS SHEPHERD'S slippered feet as she is crammed into a corner.

The door opens. The solid, respectable man comes in, not looking at MISS SHEPHERD at first.

MR FAIRCHILD
Hello, Margaret.

He looks at her warily.

124 EXT. ROAD TO BROADSTAIRS. DAY 124

The Reliant on the road.

129 EXT. JUNCTION ON COUNTRY ROAD. DAY 129

MISS SHEPHERD at the scene of the crash.

She kneels, praying for forgiveness, as a car beeps its horn behind her.

132 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY. 132

The Reliant is back, now parked a little way up the Crescent. A.B. with his bike trying to look into the van when RUFUS and PAULINE appear.

RUFUS
What's happened to Stirling Moss?..
I haven't seen her at the wheel recently.

A.B.
Taking a well-earned break, I imagine. The Dordogne possibly.

PAULINE
Really?

RUFUS
Pauline.

A.B.
Her car's back. But I haven't seen her around for a bit. I wonder if she's alright.

RUFUS

Am I right in thinking that large many-contoured stain at the back of her frock denotes incontinence?

A.B.

Well, I don't think it's a fashion statement.

PAULINE

Oh, darling. What you must be hoping is that one of these days she'll just slip away.

RUFUS

Don't you believe it. That's what happens in plays. In life going downhill is an uphill job.

PAULINE

How's your mother?

A.B.

Same. Sits. Smiles. Sleeps.

PAULINE

Are you all right?

A.B.

Me? Yes, why? Just going to the theatre.

PAULINE

Not upset about your play?

A.B.

No.

PAULINE

I read a good review the other day.

A.B.

I was told they were all good.

PAULINE

Oh, they are, I'm sure.

RUFUS

We enjoyed it - though I hadn't realised it was just going to be you and nobody else.

A.B.

Well, yes. It's a monologue.

RUFUS

Yes I suppose. I'm just amazed how you remember it all.

PAULINE

The review I saw was particularly perceptive about you.

A.B.

Really? Saying what?

PAULINE

That you couldn't make your mind up.

A.B.

About what?

PAULINE

Anything really. It meant in a good way.

A.B.

Thanks.

A.B. cycles off.

PAULINE

Actually I couldn't make it out at all. What was it about?

RUFUS

Him as usual. Not coming clean.

PAULINE

What about?

RUFUS

What do you think?

133 EXT. NATIONAL THEATRE. NIGHT

133

The National Theatre seen from Waterloo Bridge. On the electronic billboard: TALKING HEADS BY ALAN BENNETT

134 INT. LYTTTELTON THEATRE. NIGHT

134

A scene from 'A Chip in the Sugar'.

A.B. (AS GRAHAM)

... When I came down again she's still sat there with her hat and coat on. She said "Graham. My one aim in life is for you to be happy. If I thought that by dying it would make you happy, I would." I said, "Mam, your dying wouldn't make me happy. In fact the reverse. It would make me unhappy.

(MORE)

A.B. (AS GRAHAM) (CONT'D)
Anyway, Mam, you're not going to die." She said, "No. I'm not going to die. I'm going to get married. And the honeymoon is in Tenerife. Have one of your tablets."

135 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. NIGHT

135

A.B. cycles down Gloucester Crescent

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
So for the umpteenth time I bike back from the theatre where I've been talking about my mother. Though at least I know where my mother is.

A.B. taps on the van window.

A.B.
Miss Shepherd. Miss Shepherd.
(no answer)
I don't like it.

ALAN BENNETT has come to the window.

ALAN BENNETT
So look in.

A.B.
No.

ALAN BENNETT
Are you scared?

A.B.
No.

ALAN BENNETT
Not of the body. You're scared this may be the end of the story and now I'm going to have to write it. Still, now she's gone I can make it up. Narrative freedom. Whoopee!

A.B.
(tapping on van.)
Miss Shepherd.

Pause.

A.B. (CONT'D)
Miss Shepherd.

ALAN BENNETT
Go on...

A.B. very nervously opens the back door of the van.

MISS SHEPHERD appears from further up the Crescent.

MISS SHEPHERD
What are you doing?

Both ALAN BENNETTS react, startled.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Looking at my things?

A.B.
I thought you might be ill. Dead.

MISS SHEPHERD
Dead? Me?

A.B.
I was concerned.

MISS SHEPHERD
You were nosy.

A.B.
I hadn't seen you. I'm sorry.

A.B. beats a retreat to the house, pursued by MISS SHEPHERD

MISS SHEPHERD
I'm not dead. You'll know when I'm
dead.

A.B.
I'm sorry.

He goes into the house and shuts the front door.

MISS SHEPHERD
Dead! Me! I shan't die in a hurry,
I can tell you. Dead! Don't make me
laugh.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
She didn't die then, and nor did my
mother.

CUT TO:

137 INT. OLD PEOPLES HOME. DAY

137

Through the window, the tide is out. A.B. by MAM'S bed,
talking to a DOCTOR.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But as the years passed both of
them were beginning to fade.

DOCTOR

As you can appreciate it's difficult to take a history but I'm right in thinking she hasn't been a smoker?

A.B.

No.

DOCTOR

Not been a smoker, doesn't drink, all things considered a very healthy woman.

A.B.

You think?

There is an awkward silence.

DOCTOR

This is a woman who has broken her hip. And of course in someone younger and in better circumstances we would give them antibiotics. At your mother's age and in her state of mind, one wonders if this is altogether kind.

A.B.

If you don't give her antibiotics what will happen?

DOCTOR

She may recover or not. She could just sleep away. You mustn't reproach yourself. You've done all...more than can be expected.

138 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

138

A.B. arrives home by cab. MISS SHEPHERD is now wheelchair-bound. Her wheelchair has an aerial with a Union Jack pennant.

A.B.

(to cab driver)

Thank you.

MISS SHEPHERD

Mr Bennett. Where've you been?

A.B.

Seeing my mother.

MISS SHEPHERD

How is she?

A.B.

The same. She doesn't remember me now.

MISS SHEPHERD

I'm not surprised. She doesn't see you very often. Will you write about me?

ALAN BENNETT is in the window, writing.

A.B.

I don't know
(sotto to ALAN BENNETT)
She never said this.

ALAN BENNETT

So?

MISS SHEPHERD

I've heard you on the wireless.
Does she know that?

A.B.

How can she? She doesn't know who she is.

MISS SHEPHERD

That's what you think. Using your mother. You should be ashamed of yourself.

A.B.

She didn't say this.

ALAN BENNETT

No, but why shouldn't she?

MISS SHEPHERD

You write about her all the time, one way or another. You use your mother.

A.B.

That's what writers do.

MISS SHEPHERD

Me next, I suppose. Anyway, now you're here I need some shopping done.

A.B.

You ought to go yourself. You should try and walk more.

MISS SHEPHERD

I do walk.

A.B.

I never see you.

MISS SHEPHERD

That's because you're not around in the middle of the night. I want some batteries and some sherbet lemons. Mr Bennett.

A.B.

Yes.

MISS SHEPHERD

Would you like to push me up the street?

A.B.

Not particularly, no.

139 EXT. GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

139

But he does and we see him labouring up the street pushing her wheelchair.

MISS SHEPHERD

This'll do. Turn me round. Turn me round.

A.B. turns the wheelchair round. Now at the top of the slope of the street she pushes herself off with her walking sticks and sails down the middle of the street, the expression on her face the nearest it's ever been to pleasure or indeed rapture. It's a real joy ride with A.B. rather alarmed running behind her.

When the chair has slowed down, she stops it by slurring her slippered feet and when it stops she waves her stick in triumph.

It should be a triumphant scene with lots of music.

A.B.

Are you all right?

MISS SHEPHERD

I think so.

A.B.

Would you like me to make you a cup of coffee?

MISS SHEPHERD

No. I don't want you to go to all that trouble. I'll just have half a cup.

Later: she gives the coffee cup back to A.B.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

I have to go to Mass.

A.B.

You're not fit.

MISS SHEPHERD

It's an anniversary, and a day of obligation.

A.B.

Who for? A saint?

MISS SHEPHERD

No. A young man.

A.B.

Someone you loved?

MISS SHEPHERD

Certainly not. Someone I... Someone who died. He would be in his fifties now.

A.B.

Was he a Catholic?

MISS SHEPHERD

Possibly. Only he's in purgatory, he needs my prayers.

A.B.

What was his name?

MISS SHEPHERD

I never bother with names.

He wheels her off down the Crescent towards Our Lady of Hal, the RC church.

140 INT. OUR LADY OF HAL RC CHURCH. DAY

140

We see MISS SHEPHERD at Mass.

When she receives the wafer, she struggles out of the wheelchair and prostrates herself so that the long-suffering priest has to bend right down to get it in her mouth while A.B. (who is there with the wheelchair, waiting to wheel her back) notices the young man serving at Mass.

141 EXT. CONVENT. DAY

141

The door of the convent. A woman HOUSEKEEPER (not a nun) opens the door.

HOUSEKEEPER

Yes?

A.B.

I live down the street.

HOUSEKEEPER

I've seen you. It's you that has the van.

A.B.

Yes.

HOUSEKEEPER

Difficult woman.

A.B.

A Catholic.

HOUSEKEEPER

One of the sisters remembers her.

142 INT. CONVENT. DAY

142

A.B. and the HOUSEKEEPER

A.B.

I've been told she was very argumentative. Is that why she was made to leave?

HOUSEKEEPER

Disputatious she was. I've had her pointed out to me on that account. Hankering after the piano. She always thought she was right but she wasn't right. God is right, end of story. Anyway what do you want to know for?

A.B.

She's ill.

HOUSEKEEPER

Who? The woman?

A.B.

I wondered if there was a nun available who could talk to her, do her some shopping.

HOUSEKEEPER

We don't have shopping nuns. It's a strict order.

A.B.

I've seen them shopping. I saw one yesterday in Marks and Spencer. She was buying meringues.

HOUSEKEEPER

The Bishop may have been coming.

A.B.

Does he like meringues?

HOUSEKEEPER

Who are you, coming round asking if the Bishop like meringues? Are you a communist?

A.B.

But she's ill. She's a Catholic. I think she may be dying.

HOUSEKEEPER

They can pray for her, only you'll have to fill in a form. She'll probably pull her socks up once your back is turned. That's been my experience where invalids are concerned.

She leaves the room, heading for the exit.

HOUSEKEEPER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

This way out. I don't want you bumping in to the sisters.

143 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY -

143

A.B. is coming in at the gate. There are bits of screwed up paper on the path. He slips on something. It is plainly shit.

144 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. KITCHEN. DAY -

144

A.B. walks in with his shoe in his hand. ALAN BENNETT watching.

A.B.

Another parcel on the path.

ALAN BENNETT

If...when I write about all this, people will say there's too much about shit.

A.B. washing his shoe in the sink.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

But there was a lot about shit.
Shit was in the forefront.
Caring...which is not a word I
like...caring is about shit.

145 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. STUDY/HALL. DAY

145

Through the window we see MISS SHEPHERD in deep conversation with MISS BRISCOE. MISS BRISCOE comes to the front door and rings, A.B. letting her in, MISS SHEPHERD watching resentfully.

MISS BRISCOE

I've talked to Mary.

A.B.

Or Margaret.

MISS BRISCOE

Or Margaret. Miss Shepherd anyway.
She tells me you don't encourage
her to get out and lead a more
purposeful life. And put obstacles
in her way.

A.B.

I don't encourage her to think she
can become Prime Minister; I do
encourage her to try and get to the
supermarket.

MISS BRISCOE

Yes. A carer will often feel that
he or she ...

A.B.

Excuse me. May I stop you? Do not
call me the carer. I am not the
carer. I hate caring. I hate the
thought. I hate the word. I do not
care and I do not care for. I am
here; she is there. There is no
caring.

MISS BRISCOE

Alan, I'm sensing hostility again.
(pause)

You see, I am wondering whether,
having cared for Mary as it were
single-handed for all these years,
you don't, understandably, resent
it when the professionals lend a
hand.

A.B.

No. Though I resent it when the professionals turn up every three months or so and try to tell me what this woman, whom I have coped with on a daily basis for the past fifteen years, is like.

MISS BRISCOE

What is she like?

A.B.

Mary, as you call her, is a bigoted, blinkered, cantankerous, devious, unforgiving, self-serving, rank, rude, car-mad cow. Which is to say nothing of her flying faeces and her ability to extrude from her withered buttocks turds of such force that they land a yard from the back of the van and their presumed point of exit.

Beat. ALAN BENNETT is at the desk.

ALAN BENNETT

Though of course you didn't say any of that.

MISS BRISCOE leaves the study.

ALAN BENNETT (CONT'D)

People would think that was because you were too nice, it's actually because you're too timid.

A.B.

Yes. Though this being England, timid is good too.

A.B. goes into the hallway where MISS BRISCOE is waiting.

MISS BRISCOE

Well this has been very helpful. I'll see about getting her a doctor.

CUT TO:

146

EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

146

MISS SHEPHERD

(from inside van)

Is it a man doctor?

A.B.

Yes.

MISS SHEPHERD

I don't want a man doctor. Don't they have a woman?

DOCTOR

Miss Shepherd, I only want to take your pulse.

MISS SHEPHERD

Which hand? Do you have a preference?

DOCTOR

No.

MISS SHEPHERD puts her hand through the window.

MISS SHEPHERD

It's normally cleaner than that.

DOCTOR

Miss Shepherd. I'd like to take you into hospital for a day or so, just to run some tests.

MISS SHEPHERD

I've always had great faith in onions.

DOCTOR

Yes. Onions can only take you so far, medically speaking.

MISS SHEPHERD closes the van window.

147 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT/EXT. PHONE BOX. DAY

147

A.B. and MISS BRISCOE are on the phone.

A.B.

She won't go into hospital.

MISS BRISCOE

How do you know?

A.B.

Ask her.

MISS BRISCOE

Would she go to the day centre? She could be looked at there. And she could stay for a few days

A.B.

She won't go to the day centre.

MISS BRISCOE

Are you sure? Have you asked her?

A.B.

She will not go to the day centre.
I know.

148

EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

148

MISS SHEPHERD

Of course I'll go. They won't make
me stay in?

The back doors of the van are open; MISS SHEPHERD slides herself out on her bottom as MISS BRISCOE confers with an AMBULANCE MAN beside an ambulance parked outside the house.

A.B.

No. They're going to give you a
bath and put you in some clean
clothes and do some tests.

MISS SHEPHERD

Will they leave me to it?

A.B.

Where?

MISS SHEPHERD

In the bath. I know how to bath
myself. I've won awards for that.

A.B.

Yes. I remember.

MISS SHEPHERD

Mr Bennett.

A.B.

Yes?

MISS SHEPHERD

It won't look as if I'm being taken
away will it?

A.B.

Taken away where?

MISS SHEPHERD

Where they take people because
they're not right. Do they do that
still?

A.B.

Sometimes, but you need a lot of
signatures.

MISS SHEPHERD

They pretend things to get you there sometimes. That's the danger with next of kin. It's one of their tricks. They might be pretending it's a day centre.

A.B.

No.

MISS SHEPHERD

I've been had like that once before.

MISS BRISCOE

Alan..

The AMBULANCE MEN help MISS SHEPHERD out of the van.

AMBULANCE MAN

Miss Shepherd.

MISS SHEPHERD

Now I'm a bit behindhand with things so there may be a bit of a...

AMBULANCE MAN

Put your arm around my neck.
(she does)

MISS SHEPHERD

Oh. I've not gone in for this kind of thing much.

The AMBULANCE MEN help her into her wheelchair.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

I note how with none of my own distaste the ambulance driver does not hesitate to touch Miss Shepherd and even puts his arm round her as he lowers her into the chair. I note too his careful rearrangement of her greasy clothing, pulling the skirt down over her knees in the interest of modesty.

MISS SHEPHERD

I'm coming back, you know. This isn't a toe in the water job.

MISS BRISCOE

Is there anything you would like us to take and have us wash?

MISS SHEPHERD

Why? Most of my things are clean.

NEIGHBOURS watch, PAULINE and RUFUS from the steps opposite, as an AMBULANCE MAN wheels her to the ambulance and puts the chair on the lift.

PAULINE
(calling across)
Not ill, your friend.

A.B.
No.

RUFUS
(hopeful)
Not going?

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Only to the Day Centre, apparently.

FIONA
(joining them)
The children always ask after her.
They used to be so frightened of
her when they were young. One of
them's in Washington now. The World
Bank.

MRS VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
How long has it been. Ten years?

FIONA
More like fifteen.

GILES
(together)
A lifetime.

MISS SHEPHERD
Mr Bennett. That social worker
wanted to know my next of kin. I
don't want my next of kin broadcast
so I said I didn't have any. Only
they're in this envelope.
(she gives it him)
Keep it under your hat.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
(to the ambulance driver)
I was an ambulance driver myself
once, during the war. I knew
Kensington in the blackout.

AMBULANCE MAN
Oh really?

The lift rises.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

The chair goes up on a lift and in this small ascension when she slowly rises above the level of the garden wall there is a vagabond nobility about her, a derelict Nobel prize-winner she looks, her grimy face set in a kind of resigned satisfaction.

MISS SHEPHERD

Could we do that again? I'd like another go.

AMBULANCE MAN

When you come back.

MISS SHEPHERD is wheeled into the ambulance. The AMBULANCE MEN close the doors. It seems pretty final.

149 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, STUDY. DAY 149

A.B. sits looking at the next of kin envelope. It is marked: **'Mr. Bennett, if necessary'**. He opens it. On a slip of paper: **'NEXT OF KIN, LEOPOLD GEORGE FAIRCHILD'** and a telephone number.

150 INT. DAY CENTRE BATHROOM. DAY. 150

MISS SHEPHERD is brought into the bathroom by the DAY CENTRE WORKER and confronted with a full bath of steaming hot water.

150A INT. DAY CENTRE CORRDIOR. DAY. 150A

MISS SHEPHERD, now clean, wearing a dressing gown, is brought down the corridor by the DAY CENTRE WORKER

150B INT. DAY CENTRE BEDROOM. DAY 150B

DAY CENTRE WORKER combs MISS SHEPHERD's newly clean hair and ties it back.

DAY CENTRE WORKER

(to Miss S)

There! Your MOT.

150C INT. DAY CENTRE RECEPTION AREA. DAY. 150C

Lunch is being served at the servery. Seven or eight old people are sat at tables eating lunch (mince, potato and peas). Miss SHEPHERD, now in clean clothes, is sitting alone at one table. The DAY CENTRE WORKER brings her lunch to her.

A WOMAN comes and sits at MISS SHEPHERD'S table.

WOMAN
Hello Margaret.

MISS SHEPHERD looks at her.

151 EXT. BROADSTAIRS HOUSING ESTATE. DAY 151

A.B. arriving at MR FAIRCHILD'S bungalow in a local taxi.

CUT TO:

152 INT. MR FAIRCHILD'S BUNGALOW. DAY 152

MR FAIRCHILD, his wife EDITH and A.B. having tea.

MR FAIRCHILD
Fourteen years? You must be a
saint.
Difficult woman, my sister. Edith
won't have her in the house.

EDITH smiles wanly.

A.B.
No, I'm not a saint. Just lazy.
I know she was an ambulance driver.

MR FAIRCHILD
Yes. And a nun. Twice over. 'til
they got rid of her. She spent some
time in an an asylum. Banstead.
Which was my fault

EDITH
No.

MR FAIRCHILD
Mind you, she was a difficult
woman. And such a bully.

A.B.
Did she bully you? She bullies me.

MR FAIRCHILD
I had her put away. Incarcerated.
Sectioned, is what you call it
today. Mind you she got away from
them too. Gave them the slip. Does
she still play? The piano.

A.B.
No.

MR FAIRCHILD

That is sad. Have you heard of
Cortot? Alfred Cortot, the virtuoso
pianist.

A.B.

Yes..

He gets up and goes to the cabinet, finds a record.

MR FAIRCHILD

Margaret was his pupil. She had to
go over to Paris for lessons.
Wasn't easy in those days. And
practiced. Oh my word she used to
practice all day long. Only the
nuns put a stop to that. I was a
vet in Africa and when I came back
the music was out. Finished.
Practicing had become praying.

He drops the needle on the record.

MR FAIRCHILD (CONT'D)

Played at the Proms once.

The record plays. They listen. The music takes us back to -

153 INT. CONCERT HALL. NIGHT

153

The 1938 concert from the title sequence, which we see again.
The camera moves in on the pianist, and we see that she is
the young MISS SHEPHERD.

155A INT. DAY CENTRE RECEPTION AREA. NIGHT.

155A

As MISS SHEPHERD is crossing the reception room, dark except
for a single night light, she sees a piano. She stops, drawn
to it in spite of herself. She goes to it, opens it. Her
arthritic but newly clean hands touch the keyboard. She
tentatively plays the first bars of the slow movement, full
of mistakes. Stops. Tries again. Stops.

Then, as if the memory is in her muscles, her fingers move
across the keys and she plays an an elaborately beautiful
passage from the middle of the movement, almost to
perfection. The music takes her over.

156 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. NIGHT

156

The music continues to play.

A.B. walks up the drive, carrying a bunch of flowers, and
passes the van. A.B. taps on van door.

A.B.

Miss Shepherd? Miss Shepherd?

He opens the van door.

A.B. (CONT'D)

I just tried to visit you.

MISS SHEPHERD

I wasn't stopping there. A woman said my face rang a bell. Was I ever in Banstead? And would not stop. They gave me some mince. She said, you'll find the mince here a step up from the mince in Banstead. I don't know about the mince in Banstead, or anywhere else for that matter. It's where they put people when they're not right.

A.B.

Well you look nice and clean.

MISS SHEPHERD

That will be the bath. They let me do it myself, only the nurse came and gave me some finishing touches. She said I'd come up a treat.

A.B. offers her the bunch a flowers.

A.B.

I bought you these.

MISS SHEPHERD

Flowers? What do I want with flowers? They only die. I've got enough on my plate without flowers...

A.B.

You won't often have been given flowers.

MISS SHEPHERD

Who says? I've had bigger flowers than these and with ribbons on. These don't compare.

(pause)

Music. How are people supposed to avoid it? You see I had it at my fingertips. I had it in my bones. I could play in the dark, had to sometimes. And the keys were like rooms. C Major. D Minor. Dark rooms. Light rooms. It was like a mansion to me, music.

Pause.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Only it worried me that playing came easier than praying. And I said this, which may have been a error.

A.B.

Said it to whom?

MISS SHEPHERD

My confessor. He said that was another vent the devil could creep through. So he outlawed the piano. Put paid to music generally. Said that dividends would accrue in terms of growth of the spirit. Which they did. They did.

Pause.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

How is your mother?

A.B.

The same.

MISS SHEPHERD

Still in the coma?

A.B.

No.

MISS SHEPHERD

Just getting a bit of shut-eye. People do.

A.B.

Good night.

MISS SHEPHERD

Mr Bennett. Hold my hand. It's clean.

He does. Closes the van door and walks towards the house.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Some of what this woman had been I found out after she died, so with her life a deliberate mystery...

CUT TO:

157 INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

157

A.B. at the window.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...to tell it I have occasionally had to invent, though much of it one could not make up. And I do not make it up when I say that it was on the morning after this talk, when she lay in the van with clean clothes and with her hair washed, that on that same morning comes the social worker in to the garden, bearing clean clothes, linen and ointment and knocks on the door of the van.

158/159 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY

158/159

MISS BRISCOE at the van door.

MISS BRISCOE

Mary

(She knocks on van)

Mary?

A.B. and Alan Bennett watch from inside. She opens the door.

160 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, DAY

160

A.B. arrives at the van door with MISS BRISCOE. MISS SHEPHERD lies dead inside.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

It is a van no longer. It is a sepulchre.

Even now I do not venture into this evil-smelling tomb. I feel cheated that the discovery of the body has not actually been mine and that, having observed so much for so long, I am not the first to witness her death. Now in quick succession come the doctor, the priest and men from the undertaker's, all of whom this cold winter morning do what no one else has done for twenty years: namely without pause and seemingly without distaste step inside the van.

We see the undertakers men take out the body in an ordinary-seeming box.

161 INT. OUR LADY OF HAL R.C.CHURCH. DAY

161

The funeral. The coffin is in front of the altar. The FAIRCHILDS in the front pew. The NEIGHBOURS behind.

PRIEST

Lord, grant her ever-lasting rest
and let perpetual light shine upon
her. Present her to God the most
high.

As the priest continues, a man materialises behind A.B. It is UNDERWOOD, MISS SHEPHERD's visitor.

UNDERWOOD

(quietly)

She's gone then, the lady.

(indicating the priest)

He would know. She'll have told
him. Only they got to keep mum,
vicars. No helping the police with
their enquiries. Did you know she
was on the run?

A.B.

Miss Shepherd?

CUT TO:

162 EXT. ROAD TO BROADSTAIRS. DAY

162

Flashback. The junction. The motorbike slams into the van. The YOUNG BIKER's face smashes into the windscreen. The YOUNG BIKER dead on the road. MISS SHEPHERD at his side. She gets back into the van and drives off.

UNDERWOOD (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Miss whatever you called her. Oh
yes. Stationary at a junction a
young lad on a motorbike comes
round a corener too fast. Smashes
in to her vehicle.

163 INT. OUR LADY OF HAL R.C. CHURCH. DAY

163

UNDERWOOD

Not her fault. Only here's a dead
boy on the road, whom she thinks
she's killed. Does she call the
police? Flag down a fellow
motorist? Oh no. She clears off
pronto, thereby putting herself on
the wrong side of the law.

A.B.

So you blackmailed her?

UNDERWOOD

I am a policeman, Mr Bennett.
Retired of course, but we don't do
things like that.

164 EXT. OUR LADY OF HAL R.C. CHURCH. DAY

164

The coffin is slid into the hearse.

RUFUS

Well, it's a cut above her previous
vehicle.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

All those years stood on my
doorstep she was outside the law. A
life...this is what I keep
thinking...a life beside which mine
is just dull.

165 EXT. GRAVEYARD. DAY

165

A.B. is alone at the grave. The undertaker's men hover
nearby.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

Left to my own thoughts at the
graveside, one of the undertaker's
men takes my eye. Not an occupation
one drifts into, I imagine...

MISS SHEPHERD

(who materialises behind
him)

Mr Bennett, excuse me, I'm supposed
to be the centrepiece here.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)

But I'm forgetting that the dead
know everything.

MISS SHEPHERD

You should be fighting back the
tears, not eyeing up the talent.

A.B. turns startled to ALAN BENNETT who is beside him.

ALAN BENNETT

Well, it's a thought. She's dead
now. I can do what I want with her.

MISS SHEPHERD

Yes you can, I'm dead. Feel free.
Oh, hello. There are two of you
now. Is that because you're in two
minds?

ALAN BENNETT

Yes.

A.B.

No.

MISS SHEPHERD walks away from the grave, the other two catching up with her.

MISS SHEPHERD

I've been wondering. Would either of you object if the van were to become a place of pilgrimage.

ALAN BENNETT

No.

A.B.

I'm getting rid of the van. The van is going.

MISS SHEPHERD

Healing could take place and any proceeds could go towards the nuns.

A.B.

The nuns! What did the nuns ever do for you?

MISS SHEPHERD

Well not much, but when the donations start rolling in they'll realise what a catch I would have been. It was the same with St Bernadette. They didn't realise with her until it was too late. This way! There's someone I want you to meet!

MISS SHEPHERD turns off the path, looking for someone. They follow.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

(To ALAN BENNETT)

That's something you could do. This thing you're trying to write, you could pump it up a bit. If it were along the lines of The Song of Bernadette it would make you a packet.

ALAN BENNETT looks unconvinced.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Why do you just let me die? I'd like to go up into heaven. An ascension, possibly. A transfiguration.

ALAN BENNETT

That's not really my kind of thing.

She has found who she's been looking for: a beaming YOUNG BIKER, sitting behind a gravestone, smoking.

MISS SHEPHERD

There you are. This is my new friend. It's the young man who crashed into the van.

YOUNG BIKER

Hi.

MISS SHEPHERD

I thought it was me that killed him, only it turns out it was his own fault, so one way and another we've got heaps to talk about. Well, goodbye

She laughs.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Mr Bennett...

A.B. & ALAN BENNETT

Yes.

MISS SHEPHERD

I came in to your drive for three months and I stayed for fifteen years!

She continues to laugh.

MISS SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Mr Bennett

A.B. & ALAN BENNETT

Yes.

MISS SHEPHERD

Do you know what that is?

A.B. & ALAN BENNETT

No.

MISS SHEPHERD

It's the last laugh.

She takes the BIKER'S hand. They walk away. A.B. looks at ALAN BENNETT. ALAN BENNETT shrugs.

ALAN BENNETT

Well, she wanted an ascension. Let's answer her prayers.

(MORE)

ALAN BENNETT (CONT'D)
Stand by, Miss Mary Teresa
Shepherd, late of 23 Gloucester
Crescent.
Up you go!

They look back towards MISS SHEPHERD who ascends to Heaven.

CUT TO:

167 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY. 167

A.B. cleaning out the van.

ALAN BENNETT
Starting out as someone incidental
to my life...she remained on the
edge of it so long she became not
incidental to it at all.

166 EXT./INT. OLD PEOPLES HOME. DAY 166

This speech over various shots including A.B. sitting with
his mother, who lives on, on a bench overlooking the empty
bay at Weston-super-Mare; and A.B. sitting by her bedside.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
As homebound sons and daughters
looking after their parents think
of it as just marking time before
their lives start..

167 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY. 167

Later, A.B. is clearing the garden of Miss Shepherd's plastic
bags. The outline of the truck visible in flecks of yellow
paint. ALAN BENNETT is at the desk in the window.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
..so like them I learned there is
no such thing as marking time, and
that time marks you. In
accommodating her and accommodating
to her, I find twenty years of my
life has gone.

The van is hauled out of the drive by a salvage truck. The
truck driver scrawls 'On Tow' in the dirt on the windscreen.
A.B. watches it go.

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.)
This broken-down old woman, her
delusions, and the slow abridgement
of her life with all its vehicular
permutations, these have been given
to me to record.. .
(MORE)

ALAN BENNETT (V.O.) (CONT'D)
..as others record journeys across
Tibet or Patagonia or the thighs of
a dozen women.

CUT TO:

168

INT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT, STUDY. DAY. (1990)

168

A.B. opens a box containing copies of the first LRB paperback
edition of The Lady In The Van.

A.B.
You wanted me to make things happen
and I never have much. But it
doesn't matter, because what I've
learned - and maybe she taught me -
is that you don't put yourself into
what you write. You find yourself
there.

ALAN BENNETT
I never wanted to write about her.
And if there'd been a bit more in
your life, I wouldn't have had to.

A.B.
Maybe I will now.

The sound of the key in the front door, which bangs shut. A
voice calls 'Hi!'

ALAN BENNETT
What?

A.B.
Have a bit more in my life. I might
even start living.

A.B. looks towards the MAN who now comes through the study
door and greets him, and who seems quite at home.

A.B. (CONT'D)
Good day?

MAN
Not bad. You?

A.B. shrugs and the ATTRACTIVE MAN puts his hand on his
shoulder and leaves it there.

He goes towards the kitchen stairs.

MAN (CONT'D)
You coming down?

A.B.

Alright.

A.B. following him, saying to ALAN BENNETT as he goes.

A.B. (CONT'D)

It's the end of the story, it might
make a play. What do you think?

ALAN BENNETT still at the desk.

MAN

(Going downstairs)
Now I'm here I think you should
stop talking to yourself.

A.B. looks back at the desk, and the chair is empty. A.B.
smiles and follows ATTRACTIVE MAN downstairs.

169 EXT. 23 GLOUCESTER CRESCENT. DAY. (**AUTUMN 1990/2014**) 169

Wide on Gloucester Crescent, we see the real Alan Bennett
cycling down the road.

In the now empty garden, A.B. and the neighbours conduct a
small ceremony to mark the unveiling of a blue plaque on the
wall.

With them, a film crew gathered outside 23 Gloucester
Crescent making the film.

A.B.

Gloucester Crescent has had many
notable residents but none odder or
more remarkable than Miss Mary
Shepherd to whom we dedicate this
blue plaque today.

The plaque reads:

*Miss M T Shepherd
"The Lady in the Van"
Lived here
1974-1989*

