

The Lady in the Van

(A mostly true story)

Gloucester Crescent, Camden Town, London.	^{the street of} the film	William Hazlitt
Saint John / Saint Francis / Saint Bernadette	^{religious} references	Excalibur sword
Harold Pinter	a playwright	King's Cross train station
The West End	the area famous for entertainment	Weston-Super-Mare also a seaside resort.
Suffolk	a county	A three-wheeler car (Robin Reliant) ^{venture à 3 roues}
Sixpence / a shilling	money (coin in old system)	Isaiah Berlin composer
O-levels "brevet des collèges"		Stirling Moss driver / part
Glyndebourne	Così fan tutte house	Marks & Spencer a department store
Ralph Vaughan Williams	British composer	Kensington area in London (very chic expensive)
Any Answers?	video program	M.O.T. Ministry of Transport (certificate of safety for automobile).
Broadstairs	a seaside resort	Alfred Cortot, pianist
J.B. Priestley	author	The Proms concert in London
Jackson Pollock	painter	Walter Sickert
	bumpy - plein de grumeaux	

The Lady in the Van tells the true story of Alan Bennett's strained friendship with Miss Mary Shepherd, an eccentric homeless woman whom Bennett befriended in the 1970s before allowing her temporarily to park her Bedford van in the driveway of his Camden home. She stayed there for 15 years. As the story develops Bennett learns that Miss Shepherd is really Margaret Fairchild (died 1989), a former gifted pupil of the pianist Alfred Cortot. She had played Chopin in a promenade concert, tried to become a nun, was committed to an institution by her brother, escaped, had an accident when her van was hit by a motorcyclist for which she believed herself to blame, and thereafter lived in fear of arrest.

"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. 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. 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."

A lavatory - *toilet*

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

"They smell. And I'm by nature a very clean person. 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 all my mother's children, particularly in the unseen places."

"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 oneself. And I've been doing it all my life, and long before I first saw this house five years ago."

To fetch (a sum of money) = to cost

To get rid of the junk

To be on the up and up = to become more desirable

A motor = a car

Governor (London slang) = sir

To conk out = to break down

To do the trick = to work

Distilled water / holy water

To be in two minds = to hesitate between two options

To be in dire need = to have an urgent need

To mull sthg over = to think about sthg

"Sickert once lived in the street, apparently. Dickens' abandoned wife."

"Anything in the pipeline?"

litter = rubbish in the street

a din = a horrible noise

a dab hand at painting

"Well, it says there 'Saint Francis hurled money from him.'"

"Sodding beggars!"

Rufus: Sorry, you can't park here.

Miss Shepherd: No, 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?

The kerb = the edge of the pavement

Rufus: This isn't Christian parking; it's a fucking liberty!

Miss Shepherd: What with all this to-do, I think I'm about to be taken short.

Miss Shepherd: [she starts making a beeline for Bennett's open front door] Can I use your lavatory?

Alan Bennett: No! Uh... the flush is on the blink.

Miss Shepherd: I don't mind.

A chairlift

The foot feller (fellow) = the chiropodist

Close = hot

To bandy sthg about = to talk about sthg

To precept

To relate to sb = to be friendly with, to like

Squatter's rights

Sherbet lemons: a type of sweet

Cup-a soup = instant soup

An allowance = money

"I've had some close shaves with snakes!"

Market Trader: You're looking especially lovely today, sweetheart.

Miss Shepherd: Don't sweetheart me! I'm a sick woman. Dying possibly!

Market Trader: Chin up love. We all got to go sometime. Smells like you already have.

To feel guilty

To clear off = to go away

A nightie = a nightdress

A peacock : un paon

Deluded = fantasist

"I'm stuck with old ladies."

Barmy = mad

"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. "Guilt," in a word. Which means that in varying degrees, they tolerate Miss Shepherd. Their consciences absolved by her presence."

A road hog = a dangerous driver

Wireless = radio

In a jiffy = quickly

To iron out hiccups

Sheepdog trials

A pan scrub

A mop thing (for washing up)

Notwithstanding

Lumps

Madeira cake

A removal order

Rheumatic fever

Mumps

Coaxing = encouragement

To play it by ear

Alan Bennett: [about harassment] 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.

Alan Bennett: Well, that settles it.

Miss Shepherd: You think?

A joy rider

"Absolution is not like a bus pass. It does not run out."

Grateful: reconnaissant

Convenient = practical

To do sb a good turn = To do sb a favour

Thwarted : déjoué

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

Stout = resistant

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

Jehovah's Witnesses: [at the front door] Good afternoon. Does Jesus Christ dwell in this house?
Alan Bennett: No. Try the van...

Miss Shepherd: Mr Bennett. These men who come late at night... *I know what they are.*

Alan Bennett: [under his breath] Oh, Jesus.

Miss Shepherd: They're 'Communists', else why would they come at night?

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

Thankless : ingrat

Over-salubrious = very healthy

To bray = to shout

To creep = to move silently

Derelict : délabré

"Putting my mother in a home, I see as some sort of failure."

Alan Bennett: Have you insured it?

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

Alan Bennett: So, who pays if you have an accident, the Pope?

A ditch : un fossé

Alan Bennett: Shouldn't you say sorry?

Miss Shepherd: I've no time for sorry. Sorry is for God.

To be (not) all there to have mental problems

A used car lot

To talk things through = discuss a problem

Miss Briscoe, Social Worker: 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.

Alan Bennett: Through? There is no through. How do you talk things through with someone who has conversations with the Virgin Mary?

A steep learning curve

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

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

To slip away = to die peacefully

Rufus: In life, going downhill is an uphill job.

To make one's mind up = to decide
For the umpteenth time
Disputatious = who likes to argue
To hanker after = to want
To pull one's socks up = to improve

"Caring is about shit."

Miss Briscoe, Social Worker: She tells me you don't encourage her to get out and lead a more purposeful life, and put obstacles in her way.

Alan Bennett: 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, Social Worker: Yes. A carer will often feel that...

Alan Bennett: 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, Social Worker: Alan, I'm sensing hostility again.

Alan Bennett: 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 feces 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.

Next of kin

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.

A bully / to bully

To give sb the slip

Alan Bennett: I bought you these.

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

"Well you won't often have been given flowers."

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

Miss Shepherd: 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 and D minor. Dark rooms and light rooms. Just like a mansion to me, music. Only it worried me, that playing came easier than praying. And I... I said this, which may have been an error.

Alan Bennett: 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 dividends would accrue in terms of growth of the spirit. Which they did. They did.

To get a bit of shut-eye = to sleep

Alan Bennett: So much of what this woman's life had been, I found out only after her death. So, to tell her story, 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 her hair washed, that on that same morning comes the social worker into the garden, bearing clean clothes, linen and ointment, and knocks on the door of the van. It is a van no longer. It is a sepulchre.

To keep mum = not to talk, give away a secret

To be on the run = to hide from the police

To blackmail sb

Rufus: [about the hearse] Well, it's a cut above her previous vehicle.

To pump sthg up a bit = to make sthg seem more important

Miss Shepherd: I mean why? Why did you just let me die? I'd like to go up into heaven. An ascension, possibly. A transfiguration.

Alan Bennett: [at his writing desk] 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. As home bound sons and daughters looking after their parents think of it as just marking time before their lives start, 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 20 years of my life has gone. This broken-down old woman, her delusions, and the slow abridgment of her life, with all its vehicular permutations, these have been given to me to record as others record journeys across Afghanistan or Patagonia or the thighs of a dozen women.

Alan Bennett: [other self, in chair] 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: [at desk] I never wanted to write about her. If there'd been a bit more in your life, I wouldn't have had to.

Alan Bennett: [in chair] Maybe I will now.

Alan Bennett (2014): [arriving on bicycle] Hi.

Woman: [taking the bicycle] Hi, Alan.

Director: Okay, take 14. And, action!

Alan Bennett: 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.