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SF PERUSALS

A CREAM CRACKER UNDER THE SETTEE

A Monologue from *Talking Heads*

by Alan Bennett

SAMUEL FRENCH

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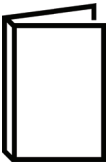
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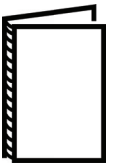
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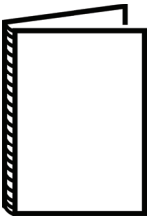
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Bennett was born in Leeds in 1934. After studying at Oxford University he collaborated as a writer and performer with Dudley Moore, Jonathan Miller and Peter Cook in *Beyond the Fringe* in 1960 at the Edinburgh Festival.

He then turned to writing full time and produced his first stage play *Forty Years On* in 1968. His other plays include *Getting On*, *Habeas Corpus*, *The Old Country*, *The Lady in the Van*, *A Question of Attribution*, *The Madness of George III* (together with the Oscar-nominated screenplay *The Madness of King George*), an adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and *The History Boys*. As well as many television plays such as *A Day Out*, *Sunset across the Bay*, *A Woman of No Importance* and the series of monologues *Talking Heads* and *Talking Heads II*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The set should be kept simple. There is no point in constructing an elaborate set (still less a series of sets) and just putting one person in the middle of it all. Less, in this case, is more; the simpler the setting, the more the audience is required to use its imagination and concentrate on the performer. If you want costumes and scenery do *Carousel*.

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A CREAM CRACKER UNDER THE SETTEE

First shown on BBC TV on 24th May, 1988. The cast was as follows:

DORIS	Thora Hird
POLICEMAN	Steven Beard

Directed by Stuart Burge
Produced by Innes Lloyd
Designed by Tony Burrough

Subsequently performed as part of the stage version of *Talking Heads*, which opened on 11th January 1996 at the Octagon Theatre, Bolton. The cast was as follows:

DORIS	Ann Rye
POLICEMAN	Rod Arthur

Directed by Lawrence Till
Designed by Martin Johns
Lighting designed by Fiona Lewry
Sound by Paul Bunn

The living-room and hallway of **DORIS***'s semi-detached house. Morning.*

The living-room is suggested by a settee, an easy chair and a table but not much more. In the corner is the door to the outside, with a letter box. There is a cream cracker under the settee and a wedding photograph in a broken frame lies on the floor too.

Music. The lights come up.

DORIS*, in her seventies, sits awkwardly on the easy chair and rubs her leg. She has a duster.*

The music fades.

DORIS It's such a silly thing to have done.

Pause.

I should never have tried to dust. Zulema says to me every time she comes, 'Doris. Do not attempt to dust. The dusting is my department. That's what the council pay me for. You are now a lady of leisure. Your dusting days are over.' Which would be all right provided she did dust. But Zulema doesn't dust. She half-dusts. I know when a place isn't clean. When she's going she says, 'Doris. I don't want to hear that you've been touching the Ewbank. The Ewbank is out of bounds.' I said, 'I could just run round with it now and again.' She said, 'You can't run anywhere. You're on trial here.' I said, 'What for?' She said, 'For being on your own. For not behaving sensibly. For not acting like a woman of seventy-five who has a pacemaker and dizzy spells and doesn't have the sense she was born with.' I said, 'Yes, Zulema.'

She says, 'What you don't understand, Doris, is that I am the only person that stands between you and Stafford House. I have to report on you. The Welfare say to me every time, "Well, Zulema, how is she coping? Wouldn't she be better off in Stafford House?"' I said, 'They don't put people in Stafford House just for running round with the Ewbank.' 'No,' she says. 'They bend over backwards to keep you in your own home. But, Doris, you've got to meet them half-way. You're seventy-five. Pull your horns in. You don't have to swill the flags. You don't have to clean the bath. Let the dirt wait. It won't kill you. I'm here every week.' I was glad when she'd gone, dictating. I sat for a bit looking up at me and Wilfred on the wedding photo. And I thought, 'Well, Zulema, I bet you haven't dusted the top of that.' I used to be able to reach only I can't now. So I got the buffet and climbed up. And she hadn't. Thick with dust. Home help. Home hindrance. You're better off doing it yourself. And I was just wiping it over when, oh hell, the flaming buffet went over.

Pause.

You feel such a fool. I can just hear Zulema. 'Well, Doris, I did tell you.' Only I think I'm all right. My leg's a bit numb but I've managed to get back on the chair. I'm just going to sit and come round a bit. Shakes you up, a fall.

Pause.

Shan't let on I was dusting.

She shoves the duster down the side of the chair.

Dusting is forbidden.

She looks down at the wedding photo on the floor.

Cracked the photo. We're cracked, Wilfred.

Pause.

The gate's open again. I thought it had blown shut, only now it's blown open. Bang bang bang all morning, it'll be bang bang bang all afternoon. Dogs coming in, all sorts. You see, Zulema should have closed that, only she didn't.

Pause.

The sneck's loose, that's the root cause of it. It's wanted doing for years. I kept saying to Wilfred, 'When are you going to get round to that gate?' But oh no. It was always the same refrain. 'Don't worry, Mother. I've got it on my list.' I never saw no list. He had no list. I was the one with the list. He'd no system at all, Wilfred. 'When I get a minute, Doris.' Well, he's got a minute now, bless him.

Pause.

Feels funny this leg. Not there.

Pause.

Some leaves coming down now. I could do with trees if they didn't have leaves, going up and down the path. Zulema won't touch them. Says if I want leaves swept I've to contact the Parks Department.

I wouldn't care if they were my leaves. They're not my leaves. They're next-door's leaves. We don't have any leaves. I know that for a fact. We've only got the one little bush and it's an evergreen, so I'm certain they're not my leaves. Only other folks won't know that. They see the bush and they see the path and they think, 'Them's her leaves.' Well, they're not. I ought to put a note on the gate. 'Not my leaves.' Not my leg either, the way it feels. Gone to sleep.

Pause.

I didn't even want the bush, to be quite honest. We debated it for long enough. I said, 'Dad. Is it a bush that will make a mess?' He said, 'Doris. Rest assured. This type of bush is very easy to follow,' and fetches out the catalogue. '"This labour-saving variety is much favoured by retired people."

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