SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an excerpt - an appetiser, if you will - from a full Samuel French title.

This sample is just for you to try out, and it can't be used for performance, downloaded, printed or distributed in any way.

Take it for a whirl and see if it tickles your fancy!

For more information about licensing this or other shows, or to browse thousands more plays and theatre books to buy please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

SF PERUSALS

A LADY OF LETTERS

A Monologue from *Talking Heads*

by Alan Bennett

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

Copyright © 1988 by Forelake Ltd
All Rights Reserved

A LADY OF LETTERS is fully protected under the copyright laws of the British Commonwealth, including Canada, the United States of America, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-03384-1

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
www.samuelfrench.com

For Amateur Production Enquiries

United Kingdom and World
excluding north america
plays@samuelfrench.co.uk
020 7255 4302/01

Each title is subject to availability from Samuel French, depending upon country of performance.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *A LADY OF LETTERS* is subject to a licensing fee. Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to the appropriate agent before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

The professional rights in this play are controlled by United Agents LLP, 12-26 Lexington Street, London, W1F OLE.

No one shall make any changes in this title for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall upload this title, or part of this title, to any social media websites.

The right of Alan Bennett to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

THINKING ABOUT PERFORMING A SHOW?

There are thousands of plays and musicals available to perform from Samuel French right now, and applying for a licence is easier and more affordable than you might think

---

From classic plays to brand new musicals, from monologues to epic dramas, there are shows for everyone.

Plays and musicals are protected by copyright law so if you want to perform them, the first thing you'll need is a licence. This simple process helps support the playwright by ensuring they get paid for their work, and means that you'll have the documents you need to stage the show in public.

Not all our shows are available to perform all the time, so it's important to check and apply for a licence before you start rehearsals or commit to doing the show.

LEARN MORE & FIND THOUSANDS OF SHOWS

Browse our full range of plays and musicals and find out more about how to license a show

www.samuelfrench.co.uk/perform

Talk to the friendly experts in our Licensing team for advice on choosing a show, and help with licensing

plays@samuelfrench.co.uk 020 7387 9373

Acting Editions

BORN TO PERFORM

Playscripts designed from the ground up to work the way you do in rehearsal, performance and study

---

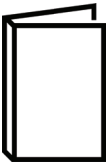
Larger, clearer text for easier reading

Wider margins for notes

Performance features such as character and props lists, sound and lighting cues, and more

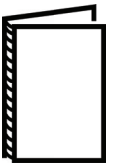
---

+ CHOOSE A SIZE AND STYLE TO SUIT YOU



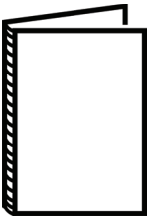
STANDARD EDITION

Our regular paperback book at our regular size



SPIRAL-BOUND EDITION

The same size as the Standard Edition, but with a sturdy, easy-to-fold, easy-to-hold spiral-bound spine



LARGE EDITION

A4 size and spiral bound, with larger text and a blank page for notes opposite every page of text. Perfect for technical and directing use

LEARN MORE **samuelfrench.co.uk/actingeditions**

Other plays by ALAN BENNETT
published and licensed by Samuel French

Bed Among the Lentils

A Chip in the Sugar

A Cream Cracker Under the Settee

Enjoy

Getting On

Green Forms

Habeas Corpus

Her Big Chance

Kafka's Dick

A Lady of Letters

The Old Country

Say Something Happened

Single Spies

Soldiering On

A Visit from Miss Prothero

The Wind in the Willows

The Wind in the Willows (songbook)

A Woman of No Importance

Other plays by ALAN BENNETT
licensed by Samuel French

Forty Years On

The Habit of Art

The History Boys

The Madness of George III

The Old Country

People

A Woman of No Importance

Beyond the Fringe

FIND PERFECT PLAYS TO PERFORM AT
www.samuelfrench.co.uk/perform

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

Scenery
No attempt should be made to make the setting realistic. There should be no unnecessary decoration, and no furniture additional to that needed in the action.

Lighting
In order to avoid applause, the lights should fade between each section of the play, as indicated, but not to blackout, the only blackout being at the end of the play. The performer should be visible in the fade as sometimes there is relevant action between the scenes.

A LADY OF LETTERS

First shown on BBC TV on 26th April 1988. The cast was as follows:

MISS RUDDOCK	Patricia Routledge

Directed by Giles Foster
Produced by Innes Lloyd
Designed by Tony Burrough

Subsequently performed as part of the stage version of *Talking Heads*, which opened on 28th January 1992. The cast was as follows:

MISS RUDDOCK	Patricia Routledge

Directed by Alan Bennett
Designed by Simon Higlett

Miss Ruddock writes letters – not, unfortunately, social communications filled with harmless news, but letters of complaint, comment and, occasionally, officious praise to various businesses and government departments. She complains about her local crematorium, about a hair in a sausage, about dog dirt in public places and then, fatefully, about the lack of care she assumes the child living opposite is receiving. After a spell on suspended sentence, she writes just one more letter, and ends up in prison. Then, ironically, Miss Ruddock finds freedom and is, for possibly the first time, happy. One of the *Talking Heads* series of monologues, *A Lady of Letters* is well-observed, funny and unexpectedly tender.

A bleak suburban room.

There is an unlit flat upstage with a newspaper on the floor to the right. To the right of the flat is a hatstand with a hat and coat on it. An armchair stands right with a standard lamp to its left. There are upright chairs upstage centre and left, the former having a cardigan draped over its back, the latter having an institutional-looking dining-table in front of it. There are a fountain pen, a spectacle case with glasses inside and an appointment card on the table.

MISS RUDDOCK, *an ordinary middle-aged woman, sits on the upright chair upstage centre.*

MISS RUDDOCK I can't say the service was up to scratch. It smacked of the conveyor-belt. In fact I wrote to the crematorium. I said I thought the hallmark of a ceremony of that nature was reverence, whereas the word that kept coming into my mind was brisk. Moreover, I added, grief-stricken people do not expect to emerge from the Chapel of Rest to find grown men skulking in the rhododendrons with tab-ends in their mouths. If the hearse drivers must smoke then facilities should be provided. I'd heard good reports of this crematorium, but I hoped that they would agree with me that on this occasion it had let itself down.

She moves to the armchair and sits.

Of course if I'd happened to be heartbroken I'd have felt much worse. I didn't let on to the crematorium because I thought it might get them off the hook but I actually didn't know her all that well. I used to see her getting on the thirty-seven and we'd pass the time of day. She lost her mother round about the time I lost mine, she had a niece

in Australia and I have the one cousin in Canada, then she went in for gas-fired central heating just a few weeks before I did, so one way and another we covered a lot of the same ground. I'd spent years thinking she was called Hammersley, which was way off the mark because her name turns out to be Pringle. There was a picture of her in the *Evening Post* (she'd been a big voluntary worker) with details of the funeral on the Wednesday afternoon, which is the one time I'm dangling my feet a bit, so I thought I'd get out my little maroon coat and put in an appearance. At least it's an outing. And I was glad I'd gone but, as I say, the ceremony was a bit lacklustre and topped off by these young fellers smoking, so I thought the least I could do was write.

Anyway I had a charming letter back from the director of operations, a Mr Widdop. He said he was most grateful I'd drawn this matter to his attention and, while he was aware the practice sometimes went on, if he personally caught anybody smoking he would jump on the culprits with both feet. He knew I would appreciate that discipline within the chapel precincts presented special problems as it wasn't always convenient to tear a strip off somebody when there were grief-stricken people knocking about. What he personally preferred to do was to keep a low profile, then come down on the offenders like a ton of bricks once the coast was clear. With regard to my remarks about facilities, they had no plans to provide a smoking area in the Chapel of Rest in the foreseeable future as I must understand that space was at a premium and top of their list of priorities at the present moment was the provision of a temporary temple for the use of racial minorities. However, he would bear my remarks in mind, and if I were to come across any similar infringements in the future I was not to hesitate to get in touch.

I wrote him a little letter back thanking him for his prompt and courteous reply and saying that though I hoped not to be making any further visits to the crematorium in the near future (joke) I took his point. I also dropped a

line to the relatives, care of the undertakers, saying that I was an acquaintance of Miss Pringle, had been present at the ceremony and had taken the liberty of entering into correspondence with the crematorium over the unfortunate lapse. I enclosed a copy of Mr Widdop's reply but they didn't write back, which I can understand because the one thing death always entails is a mass of correspondence. When Mother died I had fifty-three letters. Besides, they may not have even seen them smoking, they were probably blinded with grief.

She looks off downstage right.

I see we've got a new couple moved in opposite. Don't look very promising. The kiddy looks filthy.

Music plays and the lights fade, but not to complete Blackout; **MISS RUDDOCK** *is visible as she moves to the table, picks up her spectacle case, takes out her glasses and puts them on. Then picks up the appointment card.*

The music fades and the lights return to normal.

A card from the opticians this morning saying that their records indicate that it's two years since they supplied me with spectacles and that by now they would almost certainly be in need of verification and suggesting I call at my earliest convenience.

She puts the card down on the table and takes her glasses off.

I thought that was nice—

She picks up her pen.

—so I took my trusty Platignum and dashed off an answer forthwith. I said I thought it was very considerate of them to have kept me in mind and while I was quite satisfied with my spectacles at the present moment I was grateful to them for drawing the matter to my attention and in the

event of my noticing any deterioration I would in due course get in touch with them. It's stood me in good stead has this pen. Mother bought it me the last time she was able to get over to Harrogate.

She puts the pen back on the table.

It's been a real friend.

She stands to the right of the table.

Angie her name is. I heard him shout of her as I went by *en route* for the Post Office. He was laid out underneath his car wanting a spanner and she came out, transistor in one hand, kiddy in the other. Thin little thing, bruise on its arm. I thought, 'Well, you've got a car, you've got a transistor, it's about time you invested in some curtains.'

She moves to the armchair and sits.

She can't be more than twenty and by the look of her she's expecting another.

I passed the place where there was the broken step I wrote to the council was a danger to the public. Little ramp there now, access for the disabled. Whenever I pass I think, 'Well, that's thanks to you, Irene.' My monument that ramp. Only some dog had gone and done its business right in the middle of it. I'm sure there's more of that than there used to be. I had a little Awayday to London last year and it was dog dirt everywhere. I spotted some on the pavement right outside Buckingham Palace. I wrote to the Queen about it. Had a charming letter back from a lady in waiting saying that Her Majesty appreciated my interest and that my letter had been passed on to the appropriate authority. The upshot eventually is I get a long letter from the chief cleansing officer to Westminster City Council apologising profusely and enclosing a rundown of their Highways and Maintenance Budget. That's been my experience generally…people are only too grateful to have these things pointed out. The keynote is participation. Of course I wrote back to thank him and

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Please visit our website to buy the full script, apply for a license to perform this show (if it's available), or to explore hundreds of similar titles.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

To be the first to know about new books, licensing releases, and enjoy other theatre-related larks, do follow us on our spangley social media channels.



Samuel French London



SamuelFrenchLtd

SF **PERUSALS**