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SF PERUSALS

OFFICE SUITE

Green Forms

A Visit From Miss Prothero

by Alan Bennett

SAMUEL FRENCH

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www.samuelfrench.co.uk
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For Amateur Production Enquiries

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

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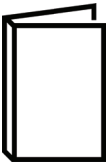
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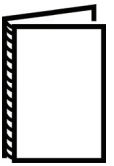
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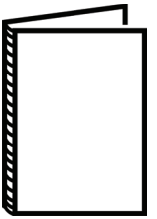
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*.

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GREEN FORMS

GREEN FORMS

First transmitted by London Weekend Television on 16th December 1978, under the title *Doris and Doreen*, with the following cast of characters:

DOREEN	Patricia Routledge
DORIS	Prunella Scales
MR LOMAX	Peter Postlethwaite

Directed by Stephen Frears

The action takes place in an office in Northern England

Time – the present

CHARACTERS

DORIS RUTTER (MISS)
DOREEN BIDMEAD (MRS)
MR LOMAX
BOSWELL
MS DOROTHY BINNS

An office.

Plants on the window ledge and postcards on the wall imply that though this is a place of work that is not the be-all and end-all. So the office is cosy if a little run-down: in one of the interior windows a pane of glass is broken; one lamp wants a shade, another a bulb; the venetian blind lacks several slats and the rubber plant is plainly on its last legs. These dilapidations are precise and will turn out to be important.

In this office are three desks, one occupied by **DOREEN***, a married lady in her thirties, another by* **DORIS***, an unmarried lady in her forties; the third is empty and plainly unused.*

There are two doors, one to the corridor and the other to a passage at the far end of which is an unseen toilet and wash-basin. The desks are furnished with the usual office clutter and there is an In/Out-tray by the corridor door for incoming/outgoing mail. Shelves are lined with buff folders containing papers, some so fat they are tied up with string. Other folders are piled on chairs, in dusty brown paper parcels on the tops of tin office cupboards and some have accumulated on the floor round the desks. There is a mass of miscellaneous information here which a computer would put paid to in five minutes. However there is no computer, just **DORIS***, who is reading the newspaper and* **DOREEN***, wearing a cardigan and a scarf, and contemplating her desk.*

DOREEN Are green forms still going through Mrs Henstridge?

Pause.

DORIS Newcastle.

DOREEN Newcastle?

DORIS Newcastle.

DOREEN You don't mean Manchester, Fordyce Road?

DORIS No. I mean Newcastle, Triad House.

DOREEN Then where's Mrs Henstridge? *(Pause)* She was green forms for as long as I can remember. And now you say it's Newcastle. *(Pause) Newcastle?*

DORIS Staff appointments and changes in personnel: Newcastle.

The green form is inside an inter-office envelope. One look inside the envelope tells **DOREEN** *the form is green and therefore not their pigeon. If she does take the form out of the envelope she should not read it.*

DOREEN Thin-faced woman. Blondeish. She had a son that wasn't right. Lived in Whingate.

DORIS I don't know where people live.

DOREEN Well, where's she gone and got to if she's not doing green forms? It used to be Southport.

DORIS It isn't Southport.

DOREEN I'm not saying it is Southport. Southport is being wound down.

DORIS Up.

DOREEN Up what?

DORIS Wound up.

DOREEN Wound down. Wound up. Phrased out anyway. I hope she hasn't been made…you know…

DORIS What?

DOREEN Well…redundant. I wouldn't like to think she's been made redundant; she was very nicely spoken.

DORIS I never had the pleasure.

DOREEN Mrs Henstridge? Oh yes. You'll have gone up in the lift with her many a time. Smartish woman. Check costume. Brown swagger coat. *(She pauses)* Fancy them phrasing out Southport. I never thought they'd phrase Southport out.

Pause.

DORIS Phasing, not phrasing.

DOREEN Come again?

DORIS Phasing. The phrase is phase. Not phrase.

DOREEN What did I say?

DORIS Phrasing.

DOREEN Oh. Well. If you'd come up to me ten years ago and said "They're going to phase out Southport" I'd have laughed in your face.

DORIS You wouldn't

DOREEN I would.

DORIS You wouldn't. If someone had come up to you ten years ago and said "They're phasing out Southport", you wouldn't have known what they were talking about: you didn't work here then.

Pause.

DOREEN How's Mother?

DORIS Naught clever.

DOREEN No. I didn't think so, somehow.

DORIS Anyway, why single out Southport? I ran into Mr Butterfield in Planning and he says a question mark definitely hangs over Ipswich.

DOREEN Ipswich! That's only been going five years.

DORIS Four. She was on the commode half the night again.

DOREEN Poor lamb.

DORIS I think she must have eaten something. You can't turn your back. Last time it was the vicar. I just caught him doling her out the Milk Tray, else that would have been another three o'clock in the morning do. She's on a knife edge. People don't realize. One coffee cream and it's three months' devoted nursing down the drain. I'm trying to build her up.

DOREEN What I'm wondering is... Where will the axe fall next?

DORIS I know one thing. It won't fall on yours truly.

DOREEN Why not?

DORIS Because I'm Grade 3, that's why.

DOREEN Well I'm substantively Grade 3. Technically I'm Grade 4 but I'm holding down a Grade 3 job. If Central hadn't gone and frozen gradings I'd have been made up months since. Anyway I'm not going to worry: I've got Clifford.

DORIS Oh, Clifford.

DOREEN That's the thing about marriage, there's always the two of you.

DORIS There's two of Mother and me.

DOREEN We've talked it over and Cliff says that in the event of a real downturn in the economic climate he could fall back on the smallholding and me do my home hairdressing. People are always going to want their hair done, inflation or no inflation, and there's always a demand for rhubarb.

DORIS Yes. Well. I hope it keeps fine for you.

DOREEN "Which twin has the Toni?" Remember? It's stood me in good stead has that. You don't catch me in a salon. Only you think it's Newcastle? This green form.

DORIS Newcastle.

DOREEN *(addressing the envelope; to herself)* Not… Mrs… Henstridge. Off you go to Newcastle. *(She takes it to the Out-tray by the door.)* We are getting on this morning. Proper little beavers. Oh, the *Bulletin*'s come. *(It is in the tray)* You didn't tell me the *Bulletin* had come. *(She reads from the Bulletin)* "It's goodbye to Leeds, Cardigan Road. Smiles and sadness at simple ceremony." Fancy shutting down Cardigan Road. That would have been unthinkable five years ago. It has its own canteen.

DORIS What am I talking about? *(She goes over to the Out-tray and takes out the envelope with the green form)* Doris Rutter, you want your head examining. Newcastle?

DOREEN Oh, little Brenda Horsfall's dead. "Death will leave gap at Goole." You remember Brenda?

DORIS Doreen.

DOREEN You called.

DORIS Smack me.

DOREEN *smacks* **DORIS***'s outstretched hand without looking up from the Bulletin.*

This isn't Newcastle.

DOREEN I never thought it was. I said all along it was Mrs Henstridge.

DORIS It's not, though. That's what confused me, you introducing her. Mrs Henstridge has got nothing to do with it.

DOREEN Better smack me then.

DORIS *smacks* **DOREEN**.

DORIS Under the new procedure this belongs on the second floor. It has to go through Staff and Appointments.

DOREEN Oh, nice Mr Titmuss.

DORIS After that it goes to Newcastle. Hearken to the book of words. *(She reads from a procedural manual)* "Selection

and Appointments, North Western Area. Newcastle, Triad House. PO Box 230. Local and District Documentation:" – i.e. us – "all communications on a district level to be routed through Area Staff and Selection with contingency copies to Records and relevant departments concerned." We're not a relevant department concerned. Somebody on the second floor is living in the past. Docket it "misrouted" and bung it straight back to Staff Selection.

DOREEN Mr Titmuss.

DORIS The very same. No, let me. I want to append a note.

DOREEN *(still glued to the Bulletin)* "Thirty-five years at Bristol, Hotwells Road: veteran Reg punches his last clock."

DORIS *(typing)* "Dear Stanley, don't I have troubles enough? What goes on down there on the second floor, or has your triumph in the badminton semi-finals gone to your head? Definitely your baby. Hard Cheddar, Doris." *(She staples it to the green form and puts it in the Out-tray by the door)* When were these pink forms due back in Personnel?

DOREEN Last Monday.

DORIS I suppose I ought to look through them. Though I don't see why we should break our backs for Mr Cunliffe. What have Personnel ever done for us? Except make our lives a misery.

DOREEN *(reading from the Bulletin)* "Say Jack and Nanette. Any kindred spirit passing through Rugeley, Staffs., and wanting a natter about the old prehistoric days at Bebington Road, remember, folks, coffee time from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m." People are nice.

DORIS Oh, Blood and Sand!

DOREEN Language.

DORIS That puts paid to Mr Cunliffe. No pink forms today. *(She holds up some forms)* One PS104. Two PS104s. Three PS104s.

DOREEN I don't believe it. What do they think we are?

DORIS That's three hours' solid work. Three PS104s. I think a cigarette is called for.

The telephone rings. **DOREEN** *answers it.*

DOREEN 3507 Precepts and Invoices, Mrs Bidmead speaking... One moment, Mr Cunliffe. I'll see if she's in.

DORIS *shakes her head.*

She appears to have slipped out. Can I be of any assistance? ...Well if we have any pink forms, and at this moment in time I'm not sure that we have, one thing I do know: we are not sitting on them. At a guess I should say they're somewhere in the pipeline. *(She puts her hand over the receiver)* He's talking about shortfall.

DORIS He wasn't talking about shortfall when Mr Parry had shingles.

DOREEN *(on the phone)* You weren't talking about shortfall when Mr Parry had shingles. I seem to remember some of us working round the clock. *(She puts her hand over the receiver)* What does he tell the computer?

DORIS That's his problem. He's been to Newport Pagnell.

DOREEN *(on the phone)* Didn't they teach you that at Newport Pagnell? *(She puts her hand over the receiver)* He says there's going to be an alteration. We'll be laughing on the other side of our faces. We won't know what's hit us. *(Shaken)* He's put the phone down. Doris.

DORIS What?

DOREEN What does he mean?

DORIS It means he wants these pink forms. I was going to do them but I'm not now. People will just have to learn to be polite. Personnel. Let them wait. I can find something else to do. *(She picks up the Bulletin which* **DOREEN** *has discarded)* Something about Newport Pagnell here. "Newport Pagnell

comes of age. Smiling graduates of the twenty-first computer course at Roker Park gather round C.I.S.S.I.E. (Computer Instructor for Senior Staffs In Electronics)." Cissie! *(She reads the item scornfully)* "Cissie is now a rather battered old lady and is soon to be replaced by a more sophisticated model. By the time you read this the old girl will have done her last print-out. Sorry, Cis, but it happens to us all. Ed."

DOREEN I don't know why you don't go on a course or two.

DORIS And where am I supposed to put Mother in the meantime?

DOREEN Send her to that place at Bispham.

DORIS I don't want to go on a course. You just want me out of the way.

DOREEN It would improve your prospects.

DORIS I don't want prospects. Prospects is what I don't want. Prospects means you get woken up in the middle of the night and asked to fly with Mr Swithinbank to Saudi Arabia. Why? Because you've got prospects and you've been on the Far East course. Though when you come in on a morning and find three PS 104s on your desk maybe it's preferable.

DOREEN What?

DORIS Saudi Arabia. PS104, 104, 104. Office stinking precept forms. Who bothers with precept forms these days?

DOREEN I hope she's not dead.

DORIS Who?

DOREEN Mrs Henstridge. I don't think she is. I seem to remember something about the Wirral.

DORIS She's probably been sacked. What grade was she? Wasn't she your grade?

DOREEN I don't know. Remind me to get Clifford some chops. He loves chops.

DORIS When we say redundancy we mean you, Mrs Henstridge.

DOREEN Tina's not on heat again, is she?

DORIS No. Why?

DOREEN You just seem a bit bitter today somehow.

DORIS You'd be bitter if you'd got a shovelful of 104s on your desk. One for a lampshade. One, would you believe it, for an electric light bulb. And the other... *(She looks for it)* Where is it...? Why don't they get stuff direct from Stores like everybody else. Precepting for individual items. A gross of light bulbs, yes. That's worth a 104. But *one*. It's procedurally correct, but it's insanity. If everybody started putting in a 104 whenever they wanted a light bulb we should be swamped. One of them is for a wash-basin plug. *A wash-basin* plug. Then people say you're looking older!

DOREEN Listen. Tell me again. Mother. Which of her hips is the plastic one?

DORIS It depends which way you look at her. Left if you're looking at her. Right if she's looking at you. Why?

DOREEN It's just that Clifford's sister-in-law's had one fitted and I thought they might have a bit of something in common.

DORIS Why? Which side is hers?

DOREEN I don't know. I shall have to ask. Anyway, who says you're looking older?

DORIS I do. Where is it?

DOREEN What?

DORIS This other 104.

DOREEN What do you want it for?

DORIS I don't want it. I just want to know where it is for when I do want it.

DOREEN I wish I had your system.

DORIS All this rigmarole. They cost five p to buy. And just think what our time's costing.

DOREEN We could apply for a wash-basin plug if we wanted. We've lost ours.

DORIS We haven't lost it. It was pinched.

DOREEN It disappeared.

DORIS Nicked. By Personnel.

DOREEN Are you sure?

DORIS Positive. What sort of a mentality is it pinches a plug from a wash-basin? Several of them have degrees.

DOREEN How do you know it was Personnel?

DORIS Listen. When it disappeared last time it was the third time in six months, so I thought "Right, Doris. We'll settle these buggers." So I got a new one and cut a little nick in it. Then a fortnight later it went again. Nicked.

DOREEN You mean the one you'd nicked?

DORIS I didn't nick it. I put a nick in it. The one I'd put a nick in was nicked. Right?

DOREEN I see.

DORIS Well, when they had everybody down in the canteen for the efficiency drive, I took the opportunity to do a little fact-finding survey of the departmental toilets.

DOREEN Doris!

DORIS And guess where Doris found it? Personnel.

DOREEN Never.

DORIS Positive. Little nick in it. It must have been. Nobody else in their right mind is going to put a nick in their wash-basin plug, are they?

DOREEN So why didn't you confront them with it? Lay it before Mr Skidmore.

DORIS Do you remember Miss Batty of Costing?

DOREEN Shy woman, a bit on the grey side. Wore a little blue coatee.

DORIS Well, she'd keep missing their toilet seat: she'd go down to Stores to put in for a replacement, it'd last about a fortnight then it would get pinched. She'd put in for another. Same thing. It got so that she daren't go into Stores.

DOREEN I can imagine. She was a very refined woman.

DORIS Eventually when she got to her sixth replacement Miss Batty got a red hot poker and burnt her name on the underside. Unfortunately they had somebody down from the sixth floor to do with industrial psychology. He was in Costing talking about incentives and said could he use the toilet? Well, I suppose, being from the sixth floor he lifted the seat and the upshot was Miss Batty got sent on three months' unpaid leave and lost her grading. Hypertension. She now looks after her brother in Rhyl.

DOREEN Tragic.

DORIS So don't ask me why I didn't take it up with Mr Skidmore. Only I know. And Personnel know I know.

DOREEN Yes. We still haven't got a wash-basin plug, though, have we?

DORIS No problem. When I want to fill the basin, like when I do my foot, I use one of the issue paperweights. What do you want a plug for?

DOREEN Same reason you want a rubber plant.

DORIS What rubber plant?

DOREEN I've got one now. A PS104. For a rubber plant.

DORIS A PS104 for a rubber plant. Who puts in a PS104 for a rubber plant? *(Pause. She compares the documents)* The same person who puts in a PS104 for a wash-basin. What's the personnel number on yours?

DOREEN RB/57/212/X.

DORIS *(reading out another document)* RB/57/212/X.

DOREEN *(reading out another document)* RB/57/212/X.

DORIS *(reading out another document)* RB/57/212/X.

DOREEN Doris.

DORIS Doreen?

DOREEN They're all from the same person.

DORIS *(slowly)* Somebody's going mad.

> **LOMAX** *comes along the corridor talking and the door opens with difficulty. This is because the door-handle is broken. It is also because* **LOMAX***, the office messenger, has only one arm. Another messenger,* **BOSWELL***, remains propped in the doorway while* **LOMAX** *unloads the incoming files from the trolley.*
>
> *It is to* **BOSWELL** *all* **LOMAX***'s conversation is addressed.* **DORIS** *and* **DOREEN** *are ignored and they steadfastly endeavour to ignore him too while attending to every word.*

LOMAX I said "ASTMS?" He said "Yes." I said. "I've always assumed I was Transport and General Workers." "A common mistake" he said. Nice looking feller. Bit of a beard. Only young. I said "ASTMS? That's Scientific, Technical and Managerial." "Mr Lomax," he said – he knew my name – "full marks." I said "Well, for a kick-off I'm not Scientific. Furthermore I am not Technical, and in addition I am not Managerial." He said "Excuse me, friend, but haven't I seen you adjusting the thermostat for the central heating?" I said "That is one of my functions." "Right" he said "you're Scientific. Don't you on occasions man the lift?" "Manually operated in cases of emergency, yes I do." "Right" he said "you're Technical." "Do you have access to a telephone?" I said "Yes." "Right" he said "you're Managerial." "Frank," he said, "you shouldn't be in the TGWU, you. You, Frank, are

hard-core ASTMS. You are what we call an ancillary worker." I said "Naturally, I shall want time to study this one out. You're probably a political person. I vote, but that's about as far as it goes. Furthermore," I said – I put my cards on the table – "furthermore, I've frequently had occasion to vote Conservative." "Don't apologize, Frank" he said. "It's a free country." "Whereas you," I said, "I don't know, but I imagine, just looking at you – and I don't mean the ear-ring; my eldest lad wears one, married with a nice little milk-round in Doncaster – you are…probably a militant." "Up to a point, Frank" he said. "Yes." So I said, "Well, let's get it quite straight at the outset, I have no sympathy for that at all. I fought in the Western Desert and I have no sympathy for that at all." He went very quiet. He said, "Frank. Let me ask you one question. Pay and Conditions. Satisfied or not satisfied?" "Not satisfied." I said. "Nor are we," he said! "*Nor are we.* Can I ask you another question? Are you index linked?" "Alas," I said, "no." "Top of the agenda, Frank" he said. "Our number one priority." So I said, "What about comparable facilities? TGWU has a very nice holiday home at Cleveleys." He said, "Have you ever been to Mablethorpe?" "No." "Frank," he said, "you've got a treat in store."

LOMAX *has brought in more and more work from the trolley. There is only one item on the Out-tray, the green form.*

Is this all there is to go? A green form. Staff and Appointments. Misrouted. Right hive of bloody industry this is.

DORIS *and* **DOREEN** *ignore him.*

"Anyway," he said, "I don't want to twist your arm, but there's a difficult time coming. There are storm clouds ahead, Frank. Big, black storm clouds. Putting it in simple economic terms, it's going to rain, Frank. It's not merely going to rain. It's going to piss it down. And some people, some people, are going to get wet.

DOREEN *is plainly agitated by this conversation to which she is steadfastly not listening.*

They are going to get so wet that they are going to be washed clean away. Washed down the drain. So if it's raining, Frank, what's the first thing you do? You get yourself an umbrella. And the ASTMS is that umbrella, the umbrella tailored to your needs. *(He starts to exit)* "I see you have only one arm, Frank," he said. "One of the less publicized aspects of ASTMS activity is the provision of more facilities for the disabled. We've been pulling a lot of strings on that. What happened to your arm?" he said. "Rommel," I said. "Who?" he said. "Before your time," I said. "Tobruk. You probably saw the film." "Sorry, Frank," he said, "the film was before my time too..."

LOMAX *goes out followed by* **BOSWELL.** *The door closes. Opens again.*

DOREEN *gets up and closes it.*

DOREEN You'd think having one arm would make somebody nicer.

DORIS *is consulting various manuals, looking for the reference number.*

Blind people are nice. Nine times out of ten. And look at Mr Goldthorpe with the funny foot, he's lovely. But I wouldn't thank you for a union. Me and Cliff that's the only union I'm interested in.

DORIS RB/57/212/X. RB is what? East Anglia?

DOREEN *(looking through the newly arrived post)* Thames Valley. Postcard here from Pauline Lucas.

DORIS Thames Valley.

DOREEN *(reading)* "Dear Girls, Journey to Luton uneventful but a nice crowd on the plane. We are staying at this big new hotel on an unspoiled part of the Spanish coast. We

have palled on with a couple from Birmingham." (Or is it Billingham?) "He is a comptometer operator and she is in fabrics. Tell Mr Cunliffe I miss him, I don't think. Vince sends his love but only a bit because in my present mood" (underlined) "there isn't much to spare." Exclamation mark. "PS I think it's the garlic." *(She pins it up)* Good old Pauline. Always has a nice time.

DORIS 57 is year of entry. Joined Thames Valley in 1957. Now what's 212.

DOREEN Doris.

DORIS What?

DOREEN There is an easier way. If RB/57/212/X is the Personnel number, why not ring Personnel?

Pause.

DORIS Pick up the phone. Pick it up, Doreen. Ring. "Hello, Personnel. Precepts and Invoices. Doreen Bidmead speaking. I wanted you to be the first to know: I have just plunged a knife into Doris Rutter's heart." How can we ring Personnel? You may, Doreen, but I couldn't. It would stick in my throat.

DOREEN What?

DORIS The wash-basin plug. They stole it, remember?

DOREEN I was only thinking aloud. Diana Bunce. Angela Barltrop. Deirdre Barnes. Dorcas Burns. Betty Brookes. *(Pause)* Dorothy Binns. Dorothy Binns.

DORIS Dorothy Binns. RB/57/212/X is Dorothy Binns.

DOREEN Do you know, I'm going to have to put my cardigan on.

DORIS Dorothy Binns. *(Pause)* Dorothy Binns. *(Pause)* Dorothy Binns.

DOREEN I wish you wouldn't keep saying "Dorothy Binns". Saying "Dorothy Binns" isn't going to get us any further.

Pause.

DORIS Dorothy Binns. I've seen her name somewhere. I've seen it today. Dorothy Binns.

DOREEN Can't we try and get some more gen instead of just sitting there saying her name? Saying her name. It gets on my nerves. Dorothy Binns.

DORIS *looks through the forms.*

DORIS RB/57/212/X. Dorothy Binns.

DOREEN Oh, shut up about her. What's it matter anyway? I'm not going to just sit here all day saying Dorothy Binns. I'm getting on with some work. *(Pause, while she starts to go through some of the papers* **LOMAX** *has delivered)* Doris.

DORIS What?

DOREEN I hardly like to say this.

DORIS What?

DOREEN I seem to have got some 104s too.

DORIS How many?

DOREEN Three.

DORIS That makes six. I'm going mad. What's the Personnel number?

DOREEN Same. The mystery woman.

DORIS Dorothy Binns. Who is she?

Pause.

DOREEN Doris.

DORIS What?

DOREEN I know.

DORIS Know what?

DOREEN How we can find out about Dorothy Binns.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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