

Opening extract from  
**Miss Daisy's  
Diaries**

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God! What a way to spend my birthday. I'm in agony. I'm pooped and exhausted. Indeed I am what those more uncouth among us might loosely describe as being knackered.

Mind you, I haven't been feeling very well for quite some time and he knew it, so why didn't he use a trailer? Indeed we could have used a trailer. No, correction, we should have used a trailer. But, oh no, no, no, no, let's save ourselves a few shillings. Let's haul the old thing over from Bristol under her own power. And that's exactly what happened. No consideration for my feelings nor was he concerned for the state of my health. But the biggest insult of all, and I suppose to make sure I got here, he asked a friend to follow along behind us with his 'modern' with a tow rope secreted away in its boot. Can you imagine the shame of it? A child of British engineering genius being escorted here by a pile of modern Japanese tin, all ready and primed to tow me if I broke down. This really is not the way I would choose to celebrate my birthday. Which one, I hear you ask. Well, a lady never likes to divulge her true age. Suffice to say that I am somewhere ever so slightly past my fiftieth birthday. But quite frankly, after a journey like that I feel nearer ninety.

When I arrived a boy thought I was Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, whoever that is, and asked my new owner if I could fly. 'No, it's a bit old for that sort of thing nowadays,' she replied.

It? IT? **IT?** Bloody cheek. I am not an 'it'. I'm a she. Miss Daisy is my name. Born in Birmingham on the fifteenth of March Nineteen Thirty Four. Three o'clock in the afternoon to be exact. How do you do? Oh pook! Now I've gone and given away my real age haven't I? You can see that I am emotionally drained at the moment. If he had bothered to sort out my engine before we set out from Bristol, I could show this youngster how I can fly. Now back in the thirties and forties, boy could I fly. I reached fifty, sometimes fifty five, miles an hour, downhill of course.

Well Boy, I made it all the way here on my own. I needed no help from that modern eyesore. The fact that I had to slip into first gear to climb the odd hill just showed my true Dunkirk spirit and in spite of my health and age I made it all the way here on my own and that's what really matters. Consequently, here I am sitting in my new home with springs so weak they are bending in the wrong direction and the bottom feels as though it's about to drop out of my engine.

So, what about my new home? More importantly I suppose, what about my new owner? Well my immediate reaction is... well she's a she for a start. All my other owners have been men. Mind you she is a bit of a wrinkly, quite tall, stout. We don't say fat in polite society. Oh yes – posh voice. My first impressions? To be honest, I'm not absolutely sure we'll get on. She has that look in her eye, which says, don't mess with me. She's rather haughty as well, so I think I will call her Her Ladyship. She also seems impulsive, you know, the sort of person who comes up with a wild idea, then draws others around her into her mad plan and after that you can be pretty damn sure that everything will end in disaster. But it shouldn't take me long to train her into my ways so that I can enjoy my advanced years in a degree of comfort. Now I've reached my three score years and ten, I intend to start writing my memoirs and for that I will need plenty of time and above all, peace and quiet.

Her Ladyship lives with her daughter and a five year old

grandson. I have to confess to liking them more than I like her. I especially like the boy. He reminds me of myself when I was younger. He comes over to me, climbs in and grabs my steering wheel. He slides forwards on my seat, stretching his feet towards my pedals until, that is, his bottom slips onto the floor. He hauls himself back onto my seat. 'Don't worry, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, you'll fly for me won't you?' Of course I will Little One, as long as your Gran gives me some tender loving care first. I'm beginning to warm to this young chap. He has a mischievous smile. But then, like every child, he has to ruin it all by bouncing up and down on my seats hoiking at my gear and brake levers and why is it that children are always so fascinated with my horn and windscreen wiper? All right, all right, that's quite enough. They work. Now please stop it.

I cast a look around my new surroundings and out of the door at my new neighbourhood. Quite frankly it's ghastly, one of those horribly modern chintzy housing estates where lawns the size of postage stamps, are cut to perfection and there's not a blade of grass out of place. If that woman has chosen to live here, then it sums her up pretty well if you ask me. A bit of a Lady Muck. Why, there's not a weed to be seen anywhere, not even among her roses. On top of that the floor to my place is as neat as a new pin. In fact the whole place appears spotlessly clean. Still I can soon put that to rights. There, I've dribbled some oil onto her nice clean floor. I am sure it will upset her, but I'm more comfortable with a familiar smell around me. Anyway, aren't we oldies allowed to dribble occasionally?

It's time for bed I think. I've had an exhausting day and I dread to think what the future holds for me. But at least I am settled again and perhaps tomorrow I can make a start on my memoirs. I suppose I should really go all the way right back to the moment I first saw the light of day, that fifteenth of March Nineteen Thirty Four at three

o'clock in the afternoon and actually my first sight wasn't the light of day but the back end of a relative. We were in this enormous building and looking around, I could see dozens of my relatives in different states of undress. They all looked very pristine. Surrounding us was a mass of humans doing all sorts of different jobs to us. When it was my turn to roll off the production line a man walked up to me and climbed in. 'Right me girl, welcome to Longbridge. Now let's see how well you drive.' At that, he started my engine and we drove out of some large doors into the daylight and I had my first glance of the world I was entering. The man took me on a ten mile round trip before bringing me back to Longbridge. As we drove in, there was a group of rather important looking men examining some of my relatives, who were now parked up by the big doors I had passed through half an hour before. The man parked me at the end of this row and a few of the important looking men walked over towards us.

'Hello Charlie. How does she drive then?' Charlie, I presumed was the name of the man, who had just taken me for a drive. He got out and touched the peak of his cap.

'Afternoon, Sir Herbert sir. She's fine, goes like a dream. This is a really nice little model sir. They all are.'

'Yes, but she's going to be the last of an era I am afraid. We have to move with the times. The public want something sleeker nowadays. So we'll be turning over to the new Ruby fronted versions with the Tourer as well as the saloons. Where's this one off to then?' Charlie checked a label attached to my windscreen wiper.

'Oxford, Sir Herbert. She'll be off there in a day or two.'

'Good, good. Well done. How's the wife by the way? Is she over that bronchial problem?'

'Oh she's fine now sir, thank you Sir Herbert.'

'Good, good, good. Keep up the good work Charlie.' Charlie touched the peak of his cap once more as the group walked away.

'Well car, I bet you don't know who that was.' Well of course I

didn't, except for the fact that Charlie called him Sir Herbert. 'That was only the big boss around here, none other than Sir Herbert Austin. You are honoured to catch his attention. Now, let's get you polished up for your trip to Oxford.'

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I haven't slept well and I woke up with a start to find myself in a strange place. Then I remember. This is my new home. I am afraid that this place really doesn't look as though Her Ladyship is equipped to look after me properly, no workbench, no tools and no spares. What? There's no heater either? This place has no heating. The weather may be warming up now, but what is it going to be like next winter?

The door flies open and in strides Her Ladyship. She's clutching a notebook and she starts to look me over, too closely if you ask me. I can smell Marmite on her breath. Oh God, how I loathe the smell of Marmite!

She starts to mumble and take notes. I hate it when people mumble. Speak up! I want to shout out. Have you noticed that people just don't speak properly anymore and the younger they are, the worse they seem to be? For example, would someone please tell me what 'danowa-eyemin' means? I hear that used over and over again. And they use 'Nowah' which I thought was the name of a man in a biblical story, something about a flood, but apparently not. It is the modern way of saying no. If that's what they mean, then why don't they say it correctly? Now my first gentleman in Oxford, he was beautifully spoken. Well coming from there he would have been, wouldn't he?

It was a lovely sunny day as I was driven down from Birmingham to the dealer in Oxford, I don't want to sound too nostalgic, but driving on those tree lined roads was wonderful. No traffic lights, no roundabouts, no pedestrian crossings, no speed

cameras, none of the awful trappings we find on the roads today. The driving was different as well. People weren't always in such a hurry; in fact the most important thing I noticed was that other cars would politely give way to let us out of the side roads. You could park wherever you wanted and I could fill my five gallon petrol tank for less than eight shillings. What's that in today's money? Just forty pence. Gosh, that's less than it costs to buy a litre of the stuff now.

Her Ladyship slaps her notebook shut. 'Well Old Thing,' she says. 'There's a fair bit that needs doing to bring you up to scratch. But we'll get there and I then have some big plans for us. But let's get you well first.' And she is gone, fortunately leaving the door open so that I can feel the warmth of the sun on my bonnet. Check. What does she mean 'up to scratch'? She looks in a far worse state than me. Snooty cow!

Then no sooner has she gone, than she's back, wrapped in a warm coat. 'Right Old Thing,' she says. 'I'm going to take you for a drive.' You'll be lucky. My battery is low; my engine is not what it should be. Quite frankly, I'm simply not up to it. And another thing, please do not call me Old Thing.

So without any consideration of my feelings, she gets in and rolls her fat bottom on my seat to get comfortable. 'So are you a one clothes peg starter or a two?' she mumbles. See? Mumbling again. I'm over seventy for heaven's sake. One day over to be exact, my hearing is not as good as it was.

Clothes pegs? Did I hear you ask? Why the clothes pegs? It's perfectly obvious: clothes pegs are currently the only way to hold my choke out when I am being started from cold. There was a time when my choke would stay out on its own. Choke? What is a choke? Oh good grief!

'I think we'll try two.' She says. I feel her tweak my spark control. Mm? Don't ask! And then... wurr – ur – ur – ur – ur – ur –

ur. Wurr – rur – rur – rur – rurr – rurr – rurr – rurr. My battery is completely dead now you wrinkled old fool. Now what are you going to do? Why don't you try waving a magic wand or sprinkling some fairy dust over me for all the good you are doing.

Then she's out of the seat and undoing the battery cover to check it. 'I think we'll put you on a charge for a few hours,' she says. Fat lot of good that will do, but suit yourself.

A few hours pass and she's back: this time with that look in her eye that says don't mess me around, you will start this time. So Lady Muck, it's going to be a battle of wills is it? I think I'll lead her along and then drop her in it. Wurr – ur – ur – ur – ur – ur – ur. Wurr – ur – ur – ur – ur – ur. Cough, cough, brumm, brumm, harumm, cough. Wurr – rur – rur – rur – rurr – rurr – rurr.

'I wonder what your spark's like? I've been told I should check that.' There was a tone in her voice suggesting that she hadn't a clue what she was talking about, probably read about it in a book somewhere. She gets out and starts to remove a spark plug, reconnects it and rests it over its respective hole on my cylinder head. In the old days we called this the eyebrow-singe test and it appears that she has decided to try it for herself, but not knowing exactly what she is supposed to be doing. This should be fun. She switches on my ignition and starts to turn my crank handle. Nothing happens. Well nothing noticeable. So now she leans over to look more closely. Then I did it. I allowed a large blue flame to shoot out the top of the cylinder, scorching her eyebrows. Gosh this is fun; I haven't done one of those for years.

Having recovered and brushed her scorched eyebrow hairs away, she cranks the handle again, this time keeping clear of the engine. I offer another small blue flame. 'Hmmm, must be something else then,' she mutters. Almost before I could blink, she's got my petrol feed off and is cranking the handle again. I allow some to flow through. Now what?

Then she's fiddling with my carburettor. It should be noted at this point Dear Diary, that I am discovering that Her Ladyship really doesn't understand us cars, let alone the vagaries of a carburettor or sparkplug. After messing around, she puts it back together and tries the eyebrow-singe test again. This time, I allow a few large blue flames to shoot out of the top of my engine. This time she stands well clear. Well at least she learns... I wonder if she will give up now, or will she have another go at getting my engine started? My money is on her giving up.

But no. I've underestimated her. She wraps a duster around my starting handle and starts to crank my engine. I decide to fire a few more times, just to ensure she keeps on trying. But there is no way I am going to let my engine run. I ponder a backfire in the hope that my handle will complete a full reverse spin and whack her on her knuckles. Oh hell, let's do it. It works and she whips her hand away rubbing it vigorously. 'Oh you are going to play that little game are you?' She snarls, I think I must have really hurt her. I feel a bit guilty now... actually no I don't. After all, she does need to continue her education, however brutal that might have to be.

I let her try to start me for another ten minutes and then I get bored. I start up and run with much coughing and backfiring and making lots of smoke. I'm really not well and she still doesn't realise it. Now please don't think I am a bit obsessed by my health, but this woman does need to appreciate just how unwell I am. I run myself to a standstill and think back to those happier times again.

Oh yes, my first gentleman. That's who I was talking about. I remember when he first walked into the showroom. I don't know who was the most eager, me to see him, or him to see me. He was a good looking young man, tall and slim and dressed very smartly.

'Mister Johnston, sir. We have your new car.' It was the salesman. 'She arrived from Birmingham yesterday afternoon. Well, what do you think of her then?'

‘Oh, very nice. Very, very nice and you were right about that colour. I am delighted, thank you.’ Oh how proud he was. He just walked round and round me, looking closely at every detail of his new purchase, while the salesman finished the paperwork. ‘Right sir,’ he said. ‘The total comes to one hundred and twenty three pounds. That includes the seven pounds road tax, less of course your deposit. That makes ninety eight pounds due.’

The man pulled a rather crumpled cheque and handed it over to the salesman. ‘My wife and I couldn’t think of anything better to spend my uncle’s legacy on than a little car like this.’

‘Thank you sir. I will get one of the staff to take the car outside for you and then you can take it home. I presume that you are able to drive aren’t you sir?’

‘Oh yes,’ he replies. ‘I’ve had a few lessons with my brother in his car. I started them as soon as I ordered this one. I wanted to get myself motoring before they bring in that blooming driving test thing. I really don’t want to be bothered with that. It’s not long now is it?’ The salesman nodded doubtfully.

‘Voluntary tests start next month sir, and now there’s talk it will become compulsory within the year. But you have to admit that driving is getting more dangerous, there were some seven thousand fatalities last year as well. The roads are getting terribly crowded nowadays. They reckon that there are a million and a half vehicles on them.’

‘Well, one million five hundred thousand and one now,’ observed the man wryly.

‘Yes sir.’ I think the salesman was getting rather annoyed at my new owner’s attitude. ‘So really, the driving test is going to be a good idea if it stops so many road accidents.’ My new owner nodded his head. I think he was getting the message. I was.

‘Hmm, perhaps you are right. Maybe I should have a go at the voluntary test when I think I’m more proficient.’

‘Indeed sir, now let’s get your car out of this show room.’

Once outside, the salesman handed over my keys and documents and my new owner climbed in. ‘Wow car, you smell really nice. It must be the leather.’ Then we were off. Well when I say off, we leapt up in the air a few times and I stalled. I could see the face of the salesman wincing at my every move.

‘You won’t forget to bring it back for its five hundred mile service will you sir? We’ll need to tighten things down,’ he shouted as my new owner finally got to grips with my foibles and we leapt away.

Heading to my new home was quite an experience. I think I was doing an impression of a kangaroo rather than driving smoothly like the car I should be, but my new owner was demonstrating that while he might have had some driving lessons with his brother, they had obviously achieved very little.

We eventually arrived at a place called Florence Park. My new owner swung me up a little drive beside a quaint semi detached house. He blew my horn a couple of times and a young woman came out of the front door. I don’t think they had been married for very long. A year, two at the most.

‘Oh David,’ she said. ‘She’s beautiful, really beautiful.’ She wandered over to me and peered in. ‘Oh David, she’s small inside isn’t she? Is she all paid for now?’ she asked as she wiped her hands on her apron.

‘Don’t worry Beatrice, it is all ours now.’ He was flicking a duster over my bodywork. I mean, was I really going to pick up much muck and dust on a two mile drive, on a sunny March day in Oxford?

Oh yes, you might be wondering why he seemed to be called ‘Oh David’. A strange name I know, but that was what she called him and he called her the even stranger name of ‘Don’t worry Beatrice’. In fact as the days passed, and we went out on little runs together, as soon as he started to speed up, it wouldn’t be long before she would say ‘Oh David, aren’t we going too fast?’ And he

would always respond with ‘Don’t worry Beatrice. We are only doing thirty five.’

As she looked over me, Don’t Worry Beatrice suddenly took a step back and looked at me rather quizzically. ‘With those big spoke wheels,’ she said, ‘well it looks rather like two bicycles parked side by side from where I am standing.’

Oh David stepped back to see what she was talking about. I didn’t think for one minute that I looked like two bicycles parked side by side. ‘That’s it!’ Oh David became very excited. ‘That’s it. I’ve been wondering what name to give the car. We must give her a name mustn’t we? We’ll call her Daisy. That song, you know the one: ‘Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do. A bicycle made for two. Well this one is a car made for two. Car – I hereby christen you Daisy and God bless all who travel in you.’

‘Oh David, you shouldn’t take God’s name in vain like that.’ Don’t Worry Beatrice feigned annoyance. ‘Anyway she’s just a motor car, built to carry us from one place to another. She doesn’t need a name.’ Doesn’t need a name indeed. Personally I thought Daisy a rather nice name. After all, they could have called me Saffron or Xanthe!

‘You see? You are already referring to her as “she”. No we’ll call her Daisy. Now what’s for lunch? I’ll take you out for a drive this afternoon if you like.’ Then they were gone, into the house.

★★★★★

It seems as though I’ve been stuck in here for weeks, then all of a sudden I’m dazzled by the sunlight as the covers are whipped off. Yes, it’s Her Ladyship. She’s been coming and going for the last few weeks without so much as a by your leave. At least I’ve been tucked cosily under some nice clean sheets.

‘Well Old Thing,’ she says. I’ve got someone coming to see you.’

Uh-oh. Am I being sold again? But it seems not. It's one of Her Ladyship's friends. He's very tall. 'Go on,' she says. 'Try and squeeze your six foot six inches behind that wheel.' He clammers in.

'God in Heaven,' he exclaims. 'How the hell did people back then get into these things, let alone drive them?' THINGS? The cheek of it. 'Does the engine work?'

'With rather a lot of difficulty,' Her Ladyship replies. 'Let's have a go.'

NOT – I think to myself. 'Switch on the ignition will you? Two clothes pegs on the choke and retard the spark a bit.' Before I can blink, Her Ladyship grabs my starting handle and cranks it like a devil possessed. Of course I refuse to oblige. 'You have a go,' she says, once she has worked up a sweat. She would call it 'glowing', but we know the truth don't we? The man leans over and flicks the handle once and I spark into life. That'll show her. She looks very sheepish now.

'That engine doesn't sound very good,' he says.

'Doesn't it?' comes her reply, 'How can you tell?'

'Just listen to it. It's terrible. Can you hear that rumbling?' She nods. 'You are going to need to get that engine sorted and I would say, pretty soon.' Her Ladyship looks bemused. Well I have been trying to warn her. 'When's the MOT due?' he asks.

'I think it has to be done in the next few weeks,' Her Ladyship replies. 'Why?'

'She is going to fail on her steering,' he replies rocking one of my front wheels. 'That's a definite failure. But don't worry, I know just the person you need to sort things out, at least to get you through her MOT.'

With that, they were gone.

★★★★★

Oh David did take me out as promised that afternoon. He came

out and started to dust my bodywork yet again and Don't Worry Beatrice appeared moments later, all dressed up to the nines.

'We are only going out for a little drive,' he said. 'Just in to the countryside. There was no need to dress yourself up.'

'Oh David, don't be silly. This is a very special occasion for me and this is my first drive in our car. I want to look right for your Daisy and you never know who we might see.'

How considerate of her, I thought. Dressing for the occasion. 'Please don't drive too fast. It might blow my hat away.'

'Don't worry Beatrice, I'll drive slowly.' Then we were off after the usual impression of a kangaroo, but this time we headed in to the country. The roads were quite narrow and not very well made. We turned up one and it didn't even have tarmac on it, just compacted stones.

'Oh David, do be careful.' Don't Worry Beatrice was gripping my door rather too hard; I could feel her nails digging in to my paintwork.

'Don't worry Beatrice, we are only doing ten miles an hour. Nothing can go wrong.'

At that point, I hit a very sharp stone. ! BANG !

I lurched to one side and Oh David pulled me up.

'Oh David, what's happened?'

'Don't worry Beatrice, you stay there and I'll have a look,' he said as he got out and walked round. 'Oh blast the thing, we've had a puncture. You'll have to get out I am afraid. We'll need to jack the car up.' Don't worry Beatrice got out and Oh David rummaged in my toolbox.

'I think we need this,' he said as he produced my jack. 'And this.' He produced a spanner. 'Now where do we put this jack? Where is the manual? Ah, I see. Right...'

Moments later my front left side was up in the air. Oh David removed my punctured wheel and swapped it for the spare wheel

mounted on my rear end. I was back on the ground again, ready to go.

‘Right,’ he shouted to Don’t Worry Beatrice who had been picking wild flowers from the roadside. ‘Hop in, we’d better get home now. We don’t want to have another puncture.’ She got in and I sensed her nervousness. For her first ride in me, she had experienced a break down.

‘We’ll get back on to proper roads again soon.’ Oh David was true to his word and just before we reached the outskirts of Oxford, he suddenly shouted, ‘We’ll drop the wheel in there. They should be able to fix it.’

He swung in to a place that had a large wooden building with lots of signs on it saying things like Champion Plugs, Wellsaline Motor Lubricants, Buy your Exide battery here and a big sign announced Weston’s Garage and underneath, Vehicles serviced and repaired. In front of the building there were two vertical things mounted on a metal base, each with a large bottle near the top and a hose hanging beside it. On the top was a sign advertising that it was Dominion petrol. Surrounding the courtyard was a white painted picket fence with flowerbeds and in the corner of the yard was a small truck with a crane thing mounted on the back.

As we pulled up, a man in oily overalls walked out wiping his hands on an old cloth. ‘Can I help you?’

‘Yes, we’ve had a puncture,’ said Oh David. ‘I only picked up the car this morning and I was taking my wife out for her first drive when the front tyre burst. Can you fix it for us?’

‘I’d be delighted sir. Let’s have a look at it.’ The man removed the punctured wheel from my rear end and examined it closely. ‘Well it looks as though your tyre is all right, but I will need to take it off to examine it properly and see whether the tube can be repaired.’

‘Will it take long?’ I think Oh David was hoping it could be fixed there and then.

‘I won’t be able to do it today. I can attend to it first thing tomorrow morning and if the tyre doesn’t need replacing, perhaps I can drop it back to you?’

‘Oh that is very kind of you, Mister?’

‘Weston Sir. This is my garage.’

‘Well that is very kind of you Mister Weston. I will write down my address for you. What sort of time tomorrow, do you think?’

‘Well if it is a simple tube repair, I can get it to you before midday. If I need to replace the tyre, it will take longer.’

‘Oh that is wonderful. Thank you. I see you do car servicing. Do you do Austins?’

‘Yes sir, most makes. But this is still under guarantee isn’t it?’ Oh David nodded. ‘Then you should take it back to the dealer who sold it to you.’

‘Well I think I shall be seeing you next year then. You are much closer to me than the dealer. Thank you very much Mister Weston. See you tomorrow.’ Oh David hopped back in, obviously very pleased that he had found someone to look after me in the future.

‘What a nice man,’ said Don’t Worry Beatrice.

‘Yes he is and having Daisy serviced by him will be a lot more convenient than going across Oxford to the Austin people.’ He started me up and to my total surprise we pulled away without our usual kangaroo impression.

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‘I’ve got a surprise for you Old Girl.’ Her Ladyship cries as she whips the covers off a couple of days after the visit of her friend Rob. This time I see a man with a trailer outside. ‘Don’t worry, you are not being sold. Promise. This nice man is taking you away to do some work on you.’

At last, I think, she is going to have my engine done.

Then before I can blink, this man has jacked up my front end. Oh the ignominy of it all. What on earth is he doing?

‘Rob was right,’ he says wriggling my wheels to and fro. ‘The king pins and bushes need replacing and unless I am very much mistaken, the front axle needs re-tempering as well.’

Her Ladyship puts on one of those faces that suggest she understands every word, but in truth she hasn’t a clue what he’s talking about. ‘This car should never have passed its MOT.’ With that, my front wheels are dumped unceremoniously back onto the ground. Ouch! Her Ladyship is looking deeply concerned. Not about me mind you. It’s more that she is imagining that the cost for sorting me out is going to be more than she thought.

‘Would you get into the car please,’ the man asks and Her Ladyship clambers in. ‘Now get out again.’ After a bit of huffing and puffing, Her Ladyship obliges. ‘Just as I thought. The springs have gone as well. Come and look at how the car is still leaning over. It’s easier for me to replace them at the same time as I do the kingpins. Is there anything else you’d like me to do while I have her?’

‘I think there is something not quite right with the engine,’ comes her reply. Well done Madam, there is indeed something ‘not quite right’ with my engine. ‘Would you just have a quick look for me? But I don’t want to spend any more money than I have to at this point.’

The tight fisted old cow. Then I’m on to this man’s trailer and gone.

★★★★★

I lived very happily with Oh David and Don’t Worry Beatrice for the next five and a half years. Every weekend, almost without fail, we headed off into the Cotswolds for a picnic or perhaps lunch at

an old thatched pub, passing through picture postcard villages. Then I would sit there enjoying the warm sunshine playing down on to my bonnet until it turned a gold and red and started to disappear behind the hills to the west. On the way home, we followed a sort of ritual. It was always exactly the same. First we'd stop at Weston's garage where Oh David would pull up by one of the pumps, beep his horn and The Nice Mister Weston would come out, rubbing his hands in that oily cloth. A cloth, incidentally, even grubbier than his hands already were. 'Just two gallons of Dominion this week please Mr Weston,' Oh David would say. It was always two gallons. The Nice Mister Weston would then proceed to pump the first gallon up into the measuring bottle by hand, before turning the valve and letting it pass down his hose and nozzle, which he had shoved in to my tank. Then he would repeat the whole action again for the second gallon.

'Shall I check your oil and water?' The Nice Mister Weston would then ask as he wiped my windscreen with his oily rag.

'Yes please,' Oh David would reply, getting out of me, grabbing a clean cloth and anxiously wiping the oil left by The Nice Mister Weston off my windscreen again.

The Nice Mister Weston did as requested. 'They seem okay, nothing extra needed today. Her service will be due soon, won't it? So that's three and tuppence please.' Then as we were on our way, he would shout after us, 'See you next week then?'

Oh David would wave an acknowledgment as we drove off and Don't Worry Beatrice would always remark, 'That Nice Mr Weston really does keep this place looking lovely, doesn't he? Those flowerbeds are beautiful at the moment. It's all so tidy and everything appears in its place, very spick and span, don't you think?' Oh David would always just grunt an agreement and we then headed for home in silence.

This same procedure every blooming week used to drive me

mad. I mean, why couldn't he buy three gallons just once in a while? But the ritual didn't end there. As we got home he would hop out and walk round to open the passenger door to let Don't Worry Beatrice out before he drove me into the garage. Then once parked up, he would produce a chamois leather and wipe me down.

'There we are Daisy,' he would say. 'Nice and clean now. All ready for next week.' In those days people would have called Oh David a creature of habit. Today they would probably say he had an obsessive compulsive disorder.

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I'm back home now. I don't know how long I was away with the man who sorted my springs and steering, but I feel much, much better. The new springs make me feel higher and my front wheels don't wobble anymore. However, my engine still isn't right. As I am settled back in my home, the man gives Her Ladyship a piece of paper. 'Here's the MOT certificate. Now at least she's safe to take on the road. I've had a play with the engine. She's a bit better, but I think you are facing a big engine rebuild before too long. Oh yes and here's my bill.'

Her Ladyship blanches, totters slightly and through a cough says, 'Will you take a cheque?'

When he's gone, she looks at me. 'Well Old Thing, the sun is shining. I think a little drive is called for, don't you?' So in she gets, starts me up and off we go. The suburban roads of north Cardiff are quiet and we happily tootle off this way and that. It's still a struggle to get up hills, but my engine is feeling a bit better.

We swing around this bend. Uh-oh, there ahead is a string of road bumps. Do you know, I cannot understand for the life of me why the authorities think they are so necessary. Her Ladyship once remarked that they were supposed to be traffic calming. What a load

of nonsense. I don't need calming for Heaven's sake. I am calm enough until you plonk those damned things in my path.

The apparent effect on me is nothing compared to the effect demonstrated by Her Ladyship. Now Dear Diary, this is in complete confidence. Please don't tell anyone else. Her Ladyship is a martyr to her bottom. Well, as a leading hypochondriac she's a martyr to just about every part of her anatomy. Particularly though, she suffers from haemorrhoids. Picture the scene. Road humps – my suspension – awkward seats – Her Ladyship's haemorrhoids. Yes, you've guessed. Bump – 'Ooh;' another bump – 'Aaaah;' yet another bump – 'Ouch, for God's sake car, can't you get over these more comfortably? Aaah!' On and on we go, turning the shocked heads of pedestrians as we bounce past.

No thought for me of course. I'm just the poor old dear who has to put up with Her Ladyship's fifteen stone plus bumping up and down on my seats and suspension. Is this what driving with her is going to be like? I'm not that sure I can cope.

I've remarked before that Her Ladyship has this terrible habit of throwing open my garage doors with some pronouncement or another and she always has that determined look on her face. It reminds me of the time when, gosh, I think I had been living with Oh David and Don't Worry Beatrice for a couple of years. Then it was the middle of the night when my garage doors flew open. Silhouetted in the light of the street lamps stood Oh David, dressed in his pyjamas and holding a suitcase.

'We've got to get to the hospital,' he cried. 'We are having a baby!' I peer anxiously past him and Don't Worry Beatrice appears, undoubtedly in some pain.

'WE? WE? **WE ARE NOT** having a baby.' She snarled at him. 'I AM having the bloody baby. Go and get dressed. You are not escorting me into hospital dressed like that.' So Oh David shot off to put some clothes on as she climbed gingerly onto my passenger

seat. The normally timid wife of Oh David had become a snarling monster.

‘Don’t worry Beatrice,’ he shouted as he returned. ‘We’ll be at the hospital in next to no time.’ Then we were gone. In fact we were doing way over the speed limit and I am sure that I was taking some bends on two wheels. Every time Don’t Worry Beatrice groaned, Oh David pushed his foot down on to my accelerator and we sped up even more. Of course, it had to happen didn’t it? I heard the whistle, but I don’t think Oh David did. He was still accelerating. I saw him first, up ahead of us.

The unmistakable outline of a police constable stepped into the middle of the road, swinging his torch from left to right. It’s on occasions like this that I wished Sir Herbert Austin had fitted us with hydraulic brakes. But he always argued that if you drove us properly, our cable brakes were quite satisfactory. Anyway, Oh David, realising that a policeman was ahead of us and rapidly coming closer, slammed his foot onto the brake pedal and I managed to start slowing down, but not enough. The constable was coming closer rather too quickly. Oh David now grabbed the handbrake as well and pulled that as hard as he could. My wheels locked and I slid rapidly towards this man who, while doggedly holding his ground, began to step nervously from one foot to another.

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‘Right Old Girl. It’s a lovely morning and we’re off for a day out,’ Her Ladyship cries as she loads me up with picnic stuff. Goody, I think to myself, I was somewhat lost in the past in there. Then before I can say independent suspension, whatever that is, we are on our way. I have to say that I am feeling rather anxious as Her Ladyship steers me onto the motorway.

I hate motorways and while it might be early on a Sunday

morning, there is still a lot of traffic racing past. Would someone tell me please, why do lorries have to blast their horns at us while they drive past? They scare the living daylights out of me. Ah, Her Ladyship is signalling that we are turning off. Thank God for that, this is a very steep hill and I'm sure I am making rather a lot of smoke.

'Where's that damned turning then? The map says there should be a turning.' That's right, not only is Her Ladyship struggling with me, she has a map unfolded, flapping around in the wind. So now she is lost. Forty miles from home and this idiot of a woman is lost.

'Excuse me,' she enquires in her best crisp English of a rather hairy man standing with a shovel by the roadside. 'Am I on the right road for the Country Park?'

'No,' he replies and he walks away, leaving Her Ladyship mouthing the words 'But, but, but...'

I am beginning to enjoy myself. What's she going to do now? She pulls away and follows the road for another few miles. Then we see another man. She stops and asks again and we are told that we have to go back to where we met the hairy one and the Country Park is just round the corner from there.

So Her Ladyship, snarling now, turns me around and heads back to where this time she finds the entrance to the Country Park.

'Ah you made it,' says a man with a clipboard. 'So this is the infamous Miss Daisy.' Me infamous? Who on earth came up with an idiot idea like that? We are guided to a spot where we park between two of my relatives, a scruffy old dear and one who, while a couple of years older than me, looks fantastic. To be honest I don't care. I'm completely bushed and I just want to rest. Out Her Ladyship climbs and she wanders off.

'Some bits for you Old Girl,' she says as she returns. 'We'll get you back to full health pretty soon.' And she dumps a pile of

unappealing and possibly surgical rubber bits and pieces onto my seat. Then she's gone again, this time to look at my other relatives.

'Would everyone taking the driving tests, please come to the ring.' The public address announcement sounds across the country park just as Her Ladyship settles in to her picnic lunch and she almost chokes on her smoked salmon sandwich.

'We'd better get going then. I hope you are up for this Old Girl.' She hops back into the driving seat and we are off to another part of the field, leaving the picnic hamper and rug where it was. We arrive at a big roped off area with poles planted in odd places in the ground. Lying on the ground is one weird contraption with a rope attached to it.

'Now we'll see how much you know your car', says a man who I think is the organiser and he proceeds to explain to Her Ladyship what she needs to do.

'Right, it's quite simple,' he says. Uh Oh, here we go. I hope Madam pays attention. 'Now, you see that horizontal bar across those posts? Well, from where you are now, you have to guess the height of your car and tell them whether you want the bar moved up or down, so that when you pull forwards your car just goes under it with the least possible clearance but without touching it either. Understand?'

'What bar? What posts?' Her Ladyship responds. I think she's doing this on purpose, but perhaps not. 'Oh those posts. Silly me. Oh, that's easy. Can I go over to them, my eyesight...' Becoming frustrated, the man interrupts.

'No you can't. So you stop your car so its highest point is just under the bar. The closer you are without actually touching it, the more points you get. Then,' he adds, before Her Ladyship can make another remark, 'then you need to drive into that gap by the cones and pretend it's a garage, but you must stop as close to the wall as you can without touching it. Okay? Then you do exactly the same

but by reversing in. Finally you need to move to where that rope is attached to that other pole. You will be handed the end of the rope and you need to drive round in a big circle without letting it touch the ground. Then...'

But there's absolutely no point him continuing. Her Ladyship has completely glazed over. She's still thinking about the horizontal bar. He walks away shaking his head as Her Ladyship starts on her 'up a bit... there... a bit more up on the right... good... down on the left a bit...'

Quite frankly, it would have been easier if he had explained it all to me, then she won't make quite such a pig's ear out of it. While this was going on, I notice a man who seems to be watching us closely. I wonder what he wants.

He is waiting for us as we return from the driving test to our space. 'I was listening to that engine while you were driving around,' he says. 'It really doesn't sound at all well.' You can say that again. His conversation with Her Ladyship gradually reveals that I am about to go away yet again to have even more work done. This time to my engine. At last!

Their conversation is interrupted by an announcement over the public address: the awards are being given out and it seems that I have won second prize in my class. Personally, I think I should have been first, but I expect that Her Ladyship's lack of enthusiasm to give me a proper clean and polish this morning is the reason I came second.

Then shock, horror. What's that? Her Ladyship has won the cup for being the best lady driver in the driving tests. Of course she's the blooming winner. She was the only lady driver to take part.

Before I know it we are off again... I'd hoped for home but this time we are following the gentleman who had been chatting to Her Ladyship about my engine, a nice man called Mister John. It seems that I am going to be staying with him for a while.