

THE CONNECTION

(Short Film Script)

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

Vera (early 60's, widow) is crouching in front of a heart-shaped gravestone placing flowers and weeding around the edges. As she wipes away some dirt from the headstone, we see ... Here lies Arthur Walden, beloved husband, father and grandfather, 4th April 1940 - 18th October 1994.

VERA

(Sighing)

Well, dear ... What can I tell you? The hydrangeas in the back garden are doing well, but that bloody squirrel is back in burying his nuts and throwing the bulbs all over the place. The noise from the car park over the back fence is getting worse at the weekends. You know me; I don't like to complain, but I wrote a letter to the council last week. Oh, and Alfred next door, you know, the one who lost his wife a while ago, seems to be getting grumpy. He didn't even acknowledge me when I said hello to the fence. He was there but said nothing. Well, that's just ignorant isn't it. Oh, and we've got this pandemic thing hitting us now and the government has told us to stay at home. They're making us into bloody prisoners, is what they're doing. That Boris and his cronies need a good what for, if you ask me. And another thing, when this damned lockdown was announced, apparently the supermarkets had a run on toilet paper ... toilet paper?! Would you believe it? How many times do these people think they're going to be sat on the blumming loo? Anyway, you know me, I'm not one to complain.

Vera begins to gather the small tools into one bag and the rubbish in another.

VERA

Oh, and I'm still getting those damn cold caller thingamies ... I keep telling them that I've signed up at TPS but they still keep calling. I'm going to have to sit and write more letters. Maybe to the telecoms company and our useless MP Chris Tonker. Though I don't expect much from that useless twit. We should rename him Chris Plonker for all the good he does. Oh, and you won't believe what the fella who came to fix the radiators said. You know what he said? He said I should get out more and maybe go on a few dates. Dates, I tell you. Well, I told him, I'm fine on my own, thank you very much. If I need a man, I'll call him to come and do a job and thank him to keep quiet. Anyway, you know me, I'm not one to complain.

She pats the top of the headstone before using it to ease herself back upright.

VERA

(Sighing)

Well, that should do for a while, dear. I'll see you next month.

She takes one last look, smiling lovingly before turning and heading towards the cemetery gates.

INT. LOUNGE - EVENING

Vera is sat in her living room reading. We see many pictures on the wall, lined up across the ornament shelves, and on the tv stand, showing her son, his family, and her late husband. The room is silent apart from the ticking from the clock on the mantle piece. Vera is focused on a book in her hand though occasionally looks up at the pictures with longing. The phone rings. Vera lays her book down on the side table and answers the phone.

VERA
(into phone)
Hello?

MARK (V.O.)
Hi mum. It's me. How are you doing today?

VERA
(into phone)
Oh, you know. Can't complain. I've got the usual aches and pains in my back, and my legs felt stiff this morning. But ... as your dad used to say, you just get on with things, don't you? How are you?

MARK (V.O.)
I'm fine. Getting about.

VERA
(into phone)
I went to the shops last week and the amount of people rushing about was madness. I've seen on the tele that people are stocking up on toilet paper and pasta. I don't know what they're thinking, but they're nuts. And did you see that Covid announcement on the tele with Boris looking all smug and that? His hair sticks up all over the place. He needs to find a decent barber.

(pause)
Anyway, how's Alison?

MARK (V.O.)
She's fine. It's looking likely that she'll have to isolate.

VERA

(into phone)

Aaaah, send her my love, will you? I reckon this Covid will be the death of me if I catch it. I'm not getting any younger, you know. If I do go, you know a copy of the will is in the loft, don't you? And I want to be cremated and buried with your dad. Oh, and all your old report cards and knick-knacks from school are up there too.

MARK (V.O.)

Oh, come on mum. You're going to outlive us all.

VERA

(into phone)

Well ... I don't know about that. I'm not getting any younger, you know. Though I guess I can't complain. Anyway, how're the boys?

MARK (V.O.)

They're fine, too. They're off school for a couple of weeks.

VERA

(into phone)

Oh wonderful. Maybe you can come round for tea. It will be lovely to see the boys again. I wouldn't mind you looking at the bathroom ceiling if you get a chance too.

MARK (V.O.)

Errrrm ... That's why I'm calling mum. I'm not sure we can.

VERA

(into phone)

What do you mean?

MARK (V.O.)

Well, what with Covid and all this isolation business, we may need to keep our distance.

VERA

(into phone)

Oh, it'll be fine. You know me.

MARK (V.O.)

I know mum, but the government are now saying people in different households aren't supposed to mix.

VERA
(into phone)
Yeah, but we're family.

MARK (V.O.)
It doesn't look like it matters.
They're saying different
households.

VERA
(into phone)
Oh.

MARK (V.O.)
I'm sorry. I guess we need to be
careful. Especially with your heart
condition.

VERA
(into phone)
Oh, my heart is fine. The doctors
are just fussing over nothing.

MARK (V.O.)
Muummm ... You had a stent put in
last year. That's not fussing.

VERA
(into phone)
Give over. I'm fine.

MARK (V.O.)
I know. But just to be safe, maybe
we hold off for a couple of weeks
and see if this thing goes away.

Vera pulls out a tissue from her cardigan sleeve and wipes
away a tear.

VERA
(into phone)
I guess so.

MARK (V.O.)
I'm sorry. We'll see you in a
couple of weeks. OK?

VERA
(into phone)
OK. Bye dear.

MARK (V.O.)
Bye mum.

Vera puts the phone back in its charging cradle and sighs. She
looks around at the pictures, holding on each one for a second
or two before moving on to the next. Finally, her eyes rest on
a picture of her husband.

VERA
Wish you were still here. You'd
know what to do.

Vera slowly lowers her eyes to the floor and stares, misty eyed.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Vera is lonely ... Vera is standing staring into the street while stirring a cup of tea. Vera is sat at a table, mug in hand, staring at the wall. Vera is sat on the sofa flicking through old photographs. Vera is stood at the rear window staring into the back garden with a few tears trickling down her cheeks.

INT. LOUNGE - EARLY EVENING

Vera is sat in her chair, flicking aimlessly through channels on the tv. We see her stop on a channel where David Attenborough is talking about hedgehogs.

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

... and here we see the mother alone. Her brood has left the nest and she must now make her way through her solitary life. She pushes her way through the brush. Any encounter with other hedgehogs will, most often, end in her being pushed or rolled away.

Vera grasps the remote tighter and turns her full attention to the TV.

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

... Of course, it is not only this solitary life which she must bear, but there are many dangers she faces. Here, we see her trying to cross a road as the cars fly past, unaware of her plight.

Vera looks forlornly out through the net curtains toward the road before returning her attention to the TV

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

... But all is not lost. She has found a hole in a fence leading to a garden. This is, of course, not by accident. This is part of a hedgehog highway. A series of holes cut into adjoining fences to create a haven for hedgehogs.

The phone rings but Vera ignores it. Vera puts down her remote and reaches for her late husband's laptop. Lifting the lid, she logs on and begins typing, searching for information on hedgehogs and how to help. A short while later, vera puts the laptop to one side and heads outside to the tool shed.

VERA

Right. One of those. That ... and that. You'll do.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Vera takes the tools and begins hacking away at the fence line. We see her cut out 3 holes in various positions between her garden and the field her garden backs on to. We then see Vera turn her attention to the fence adjoining the neighbour.

VERA

Hmmm. Strictly speaking, that's not my fence. But needs must.

Vera lays her tools down on the ground and begins to cut holes between the gardens.

ALFRED (MID 60'S, WIDOWER, LONG TIME NEIGHBOUR)

What the bloody hell are you doing?
That's my fence.

VERA

Oh. Hello. I didn't see you there.
It's only a small hole. I hope you
don't mind.

ALFRED

I don't care how big it is. What
the hell do you think you're doing?

VERA

I'm trying to create a hedgehog
highway.

ALFRED

A hedgehog what?

VERA

A hedgehog highway. You see, I was
watching David Attenborough and ...

ALFRED

I don't care who you were watching.
You can't cut up my fence.

VERA

But I was just ...

ALFRED

I don't care woman. Stop it right
now.

VERA

(Frustrated)

I ...

ALFRED

I don't want to hear it.

VERA

(Frustrated)

But if I don't do it, they could
get killed by the cars. Surely,
you've seen them zooming up and
down here

ALFRED

(Angry)

I said, I don't want to hear it.

VERA

(Angry)

Now look here, you. Don't you care?
Your wife would have cared.

ALFRED

(Angry)

Yeah, well my wife isn't here, is
she? What you don't seem to realise
is that the place you're cutting is
right next to her roses. In fact, I
think you may have damaged one of
them.

Vera stops what she's doing and sits back on the decking. With
her head in her hands, she begins to sob softly. Alfred
marches back into his house, muttering under his breath.

INT. ALFRED'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Alfred is sat at the kitchen table in his dressing gown drinking tea and reading his newspaper. His dog, Spike, is lay by its food bowl. Alfred lays down his paper and looks at the dog.

ALFRED

(Annoyed)

That bloody woman. You won't believe what she was doing yesterday ... She was cutting holes in the bloody fence.

Spike tilts his head as if listening.

ALFRED

(Annoyed)

Some codswallop about a hedgehog something or other. I don't know. The woman's a lunatic. I mean ... Why would I let them creatures into the garden, eh? I'll have no plants left. They'll dig up my bulbs. I have enough trouble with the slugs and snails without inviting more wildlife in.

Spike stands and walks over to Alfred. Alfred pats spikes neck with affection.

ALFRED

There's a good boy. You're a good listener, aren't you? How about we go to Marjorie's plot this afternoon? Give you a good walk?

INT. LOUNGE - AFTERNOON A FEW DAYS LATER

Vera is stood at the back door looking around her garden. She unlocks the side gate and drags the black bin through and down the driveway. She looks up and down the road and at the various windows of the houses. She sighs heavily. The silence is pierced by thumping music coming toward her, and she steps back as we see a car speed past.

VERA
(Shouting)
Bloody maniac.

Vera holds her hands to her chest.

VERA
(Panting)
That was close.

As the car disappears down the street, her eyes come to rest on a small brown object in the roadside gutter. She walks over to it and stoops.

VERA
Oh, you poor thing.

Vera takes the towel which is tucked inside her pinny and reaches down. Picking up the hedgehog, she rolls it over in her hands. We see that the hedgehog isn't breathing and looks like it may have been clipped by a previous car.

VERA
You poor, poor thing. Those damn
cars are always speeding down here.
Come on.

Vera retraces her steps and on entering her back-garden heads for her late husband's tool shed. She retrieves a long-handled trowel and digs a hole at the back of a flower bed. She lays the hedgehog into the hole and bids it farewell, before covering it over and placing a makeshift cross on the grave. She heads back inside the house.

INT. ALFRED'S LOUNGE - MORNING

Alfred is sat in his armchair flicking through channels and grumbling to himself about the rubbish that is being shown. His dog, Spike, is lay at his feet.

ALFRED

Would you believe it, Spike?
Nothing on, again. Why do I even
pay for my TV license? Look.

Alfred flicks through a few more channels before thumping the TV remote onto the arm of the chair. We hear a knock on the front door.

ALFRED

And who the hell do you think that
is? If it's the TV license people,
I'm going to give them what for.

Alfred pushed himself upright, massaging his back before heading towards the door with Spike following. He answers the door.

ALFRED

WHAT? ... Oh, it's you.

VERA

I'm sorry to disturb you Alfred,
but I was just wondering if I could
talk to you about the hedgehogs.

ALFRED

You sound like the Jehovah's bloody
witnesses.

Spike lays down looking out sorrowfully at Vera. He switches his gaze between the two of them as they continue.

VERA

I'm really sorry to bother you
Alfred, it's just, I've been
watching a documentary about them
and they need help.

ALFRED

And why aren't the charities
helping? Isn't that why they ask
for money?

VERA

It is, but they need more.

ALFRED

They always seem to need more, in
my opinion. And what can we do that
they can't?

VERA

Well ... That's what the holes are for, you see. The hedgehogs need some safe passageways through the gardens or they risk being run over. Apparently, the hedgehog population in this country is on its knees. They're facing extinction. Hedgehog highways are being suggested to help them.

ALFRED

And what will they do in my garden? Run around, trampling my plants and eating my bulbs?

VERA

Actually, they're supposed to be good for gardens and friends of gardeners. They eat slugs and snails. But they can't roam around like they used to due to the privacy fencing everyone puts round their gardens nowadays. Hence the highway idea.

ALFRED

That's all very well, but you can't just hack away at someone's fence like that.

VERA

I am very sorry about that. I should have asked, and I normally rely on my son Mark to help, but due to Covid I won't see him for a while. I just thought ...

ALFRED

You thought what? That I would just let them in?

VERA

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come.

Vera walks away from the door and go back towards her house. Alfred shakes his head before closing the door and heads back to the lounge where he slumps down. Spike comes up next to him and nuzzles his hand.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

Alfred is out walking with Spike. He enters the cemetery and heads towards a tree at the back. Hanging from the tree we see several bird feeders, bird houses and a squirrel feeder. Alfred stoops down at the base of the tree and brushes away some detritus from the top of a headstone.

ALFRED

Hi Marjorie. It's only me ... oh and Spike, of course.

Alfred pats Spike's neck, and the dog settles next to the headstone, wagging its tail.

ALFRED

I hope you're OK. I'm sorry it's been a while. I've had a few health issues and then of course trying to keep the garden to your exacting standards.

(pause)

I miss you, dear. The boys don't come round very often. They've got their own lives, of course, and I want them to live theirs while they can ... but the house does feel empty ... even with Spike here.

On hearing his name, Spike thumps his tail against the ground.

ALFRED

What else can I tell you? There's even less on tele today than there was last time I came. I don't even know why I pay my license fee. I'm sure if you were here today, you'd be giving me some jobs to do around the house ... but to be honest I don't see the point. I've got the garden of course and I've managed to train your roses up the fence ... Oh ... Talking of the fence, you won't believe what Vera was doing the other day.

Alfred sits down on the ground while he scrapes away at the base of the headstone.

ALFRED

She was trying to cut some holes in the fence. Right next to your roses. Of course, I stopped her, but I couldn't believe the nerve.

(pause)

She came around earlier today apologising but ... you can't just do that, can you? I mean?

(pause)

I know you used to like your animals and birds, but you'd have never cut away at someone's fence without asking.

Alfred scans over the various feeders and houses, a faraway look in his eyes.

ALFRED

She said something about a hedgehog highway. Can you imagine? Maybe the hedgehogs can reach great speeds and they need over taking lanes.

(pause)

I miss you. You used to be the one championing the wildlife. God knows how many feeders and boxes we still have at home, which we never got round to. I've put as many as I can on here, but now, I've run out of space.

Alfred sighs heavily and leans back against the tree. Spike stands, comes across to Alfred and lies by his side. Spike rests his chin on Alfred's lap while Alfred strokes his head. We see them sit for a while in silence apart from the birds flying to and fro between the feeders.

EXT. VERA'S FRONT DOOR - AFTERNOON

Mark (early 30's, Vera's son) rings the doorbell and stands back. Vera appears at the bay window next to the front door. She opens the window a small amount.

VERA

Hi.

MARK

Mum. Are you okay?

VERA

I'm fine, dear.

MARK

You haven't been answering your phone.

VERA

I've been busy.

MARK

We've been worried about you.

VERA

I'm fine. Really.

MARK

Look ... I'm sorry about this lockdown business. They say we have to socially distance.

VERA

I know.

MARK

... and we're only thinking of you.

VERA

I know.

MARK

It's just ... such a pain.

VERA

I'm OK.

MARK

Is there anything we can do?

VERA

No. I'm fine honest ... Just ...

MARK

Just what?

VERA
Oh, it's nothing?

MARK
No, what is it?

VERA
It's just, I was watching a
programme about hedgehogs and their
risk of extinction.

MARK
Right?

VERA
And I was hoping to put some holes
in the fence, but Alfred next door
hasn't been cooperative, and I was
wondering if you could do
something?

MARK
Oh ... I'm sorry mum, I can't.

VERA
Why not?

MARK
Because of Covid mum. I can't
interact with Alfred, and I
shouldn't even be here. I can't
come into your garden.

VERA
Oh.

MARK
I'm sorry, mum. If there's anything
else like shopping, or whatever?
Let me know if you need anything
else ... OK?

VERA
(Sighing)
Will do.

MARK
OK. See you later.

VERA
Bye dear.

Mark heads back down the driveway, gets into his car and drives away. Vera returns to the sofa.

CUT TO:

We see Vera looking through old photographs of previous family get-togethers, parties, weddings, christenings, school photos. Vera pauses, tearily when she gets to a picture of her late husband.

VERA

Oh, Charles. I wish you were here.
I miss you. And I miss the kids. I
try to cope but ... well, when you
were here you used to do so much
even if it was just a hug. Maybe
you could have had a chat to him
next door. I've done what I can but
don't feel like it's enough.

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EXT. ROADSIDE OPPOSITE VERA'S FRONT DOOR - AFTERNOON

We see Alfred, coming back from the cemetery with Spike. He watches Mark's visit from across the road. When Mark's car is out of sight, we see Alfred turn to cross the road toward his gate. The silence is pierced by thumping music coming toward him and he steps back, pulling Spike onto the curb as we see a car speed past.

ALFRED
(Shouting)
Jeeeeezus. Lunatic.

Alfred holds his hand to his chest. He looks down at Spike and pats him on the neck.

ALFRED
(Breathing Heavy)
That was close boy. Wasn't it?

As the car disappears down the street, his eyes come to rest on a red stain in the roadside gutter. We see Alfred alternate looking up & down the road at the red stain and at Vera's house. Alfred walks across to Vera's front door, rings the doorbell, and stands back. Vera appears at the bay windows and on seeing Alfred, wipes her eyes and sighs heavily.

INT. DINING ROOM - THE FOLLOWING EVENING

We see Vera switch off the dining room light and sit quietly on the floor. She rests her forehead against the patio door glass, peering into the darkness, looking for signs of wildlife. Silence descends apart from the tick, tick, ticking of the radiators.

VERA

Where are you? The food's right there.

Vera sees movement towards the end of the garden and leans forward for a closer look.

VERA

Come on. It's alright. What if I put the patio lights on? Will I scare them away? They come out at night. Won't light disturb them? The light could hurt their eyes. They are nocturnal, after all. I'll leave them off. Wait. What's that? Not you.

Vera sees a black cat stalk forward towards the food. Vera bangs on the glass.

VERA

I hope I haven't scared away any hedgehogs. Why are you just standing there looking at me? Go away. You're always after the mice near the bird feeders. Go on. Bugger off and leave the hedgehogs food alone. Arrogant bloody cat.

Vera bangs on the glass again. The cat wanders nonchalantly away. Vera settles back down to watch the garden shadows. She looks across at a photo of her husband.

VERA

Come on. I know. It's getting late. Not sure I can stay awake much longer. I'll wait a bit.

(Pause)

What's that? Is it? Yes, it is. Aaaah it's so cute.

We see a small hedgehog snuffling near the food dish.

VERA

Go on. Go on, little one. YESSSSS.
Oh, you're so sweet. I wonder if I
could go out. No. I don't want to
disturb it. It? I wonder if it's a
he, or a she? How do I tell? I'll
have to look online tomorrow. Oh,
it's so sweet. Oh. Where are you
going? Are you finished? Eat as
much as you want. There's still
loads of food.

We see the hedgehog heading for the hole under a bush and then go through into the field leaving a dark lonely garden once more.

VERA

Bye little one. Come back soon.
Well, that was exciting, wasn't it?

ALFRED

Yes. It was.

We see Alfred sit next to Vera and hand her a glass of red wine. We see Spike sit down next to Vera and nuzzles her side craving attention. Vera smiles at spike, ruffling the top of his head. We see Vera smile at Alfred who returns the smile, before they both return their gazes to the garden while sipping the wine.

VERA

I'm so glad you helped me with
those holes. You've done a
wonderful job.

ALFRED

Well ... I'm glad I could be of
service. And thank you for inviting
me over. Marjorie would have loved
seeing these.

VERA

Did she like hedgehogs?

ALFRED

She loved all wildlife. We have a
garage full of food, feeders, and
boxes. If you want, tomorrow, I can
put up some bird boxes for you.
I've even got a bat box somewhere.

VERA

Oh my. That would be wonderful. But
don't you want them in your garden?

ALFRED

(Chuckling)

I think we have enough.

VERA
Well ... if you wouldn't mind.

ALFRED
Not at all. Shall we say 10
O'Clockish?

VERA
(Beaming)
It's a date.

Vera and Alfred return to gaze out of the window waiting for their next guest.

FADE OUT:

END.