

# **NOISES OFF**

a play in three acts by

Michael Frayn

November 2001. Post-production London, post-production New York. As supplied to Methuen (27 Nov 2001) and Samuel French Inc. The copy for the programme of *Nothing On* is included at the end.

	Character	Original Line	New Line	GENERAL NOTE: "love"--> "dear" and "tea" --> "coffee" use your judgement when
Nothing On				
1	Vicki	files to our Basingstoke office	files to our Stratford office	We have decided to adapt some changes in our version of the script, as the setting will be in America, with an American company performing the play Nothing On with British accents. Please take note while reading!
4	Roger	It's the airing cupboard	It's the linen closet	
7	Mrs. Clackett	In the airing cupboard, were you?	In the linen closet, were you?	
8	Roger	something in the airing cupboard!	something in the linen closet!	
18	Burglar	WC? I'll fix it.	WC? Water Closet? I'll fix it.	
19	Vicki	Inland Revenue in Basingstoke	Inland Revenue in Stratford	
20	Burglar	down there in Basingstoke	down there in Stratford	
Act 1				
13	Dotty	how about the words, love?	how about the words, hun?	
14	Garry	Here you are, love.	here you are, dear	
14	Garry	Don't worry, love,	don't worry, dear	
15	Garry	Fine. But, Dotty, love,	Fine. But, Dotty, hun.	
15	Garry	we've only had a fortnight to rehearse	we've only had a week to rehearse	
15	Garry	got to play Weston-super-Mare...Yeovil	got to play Cleveland...Chicago	
16	Vicki	files to our Basingstoke office	files to our Stratford office	
22	Roger	It's the airing cupboard	It's the linen closet	
22	Garry	Sorry, love, this door won't open	Sorry, this door won't open	
22	Belinda	Sorry, love, this door won't close	Sorry, this door won't close	
23	Dotty	wait till we've got to Stockton-on-Tees	wait till we've got to Broadway	
23	Belinda	What did he feel like, Lloyd, my love?	What did he feel like, Lloyd, my dear?	
24	Belinda	Tim, my love, this door won't close	Tim, this door won't close	
26	Dotty	prop room and the paint store?	prop room and the paint storage?	
26	Lloyd	ring the police	call the police	
26	Dotty	It's my fault, Lloyd, my love	It's my fault, Lloyd, my dear	
26	Garry	It's my fault, my precious	It's my fault, my dear	
26	Lloyd	we know that, garry, love	we know that, garry, dearest	
27	Selsdon	Is it? How killing!	Is it? Great!	
27	Selsdon	I was having a little postprandial snooze at the back of the stalls	I was having a little snooze at the back of the theater	
28	Lloyd	do all the company's VAT?	do all the company's taxes?	
28	Tim	VAT, right	taxes, right	
28	Selsdon	So what's next on the bill?	So what's next on the agenda?	
28	Selsdon	This is the beer in the wardrobe, is it?	There is beer in the wardrobe, though, isn't there?	
35	Garry	of course not, love	of course not	
36	Belinda	Bless you, my sweet	bless you, dear	
37	Mrs. Clackett	In the airing cupboard, were you?	In the linen closet, were you?	
39	Roger	something in the airing cupboard!	something in the linen closet!	
41	Frederick	Pick your feet up one by one	...one at a time	
41	Belinda	Oh, look at Freddie, the poor love	...the poor dear	
42	Lloyd	Yes... live theatre in Weston-super-Mare	...live theatre in Philadelphia	

42	Dotty	Where was it, love?	Where was it, dear?	
48	Lloyd	It's like Myra Hess playing on through the air raids	It's like the orchestra playing on as the Titanic sank	
49	Selsdon	I met Myra Hess once	My great aunt was on the Titanic	
49	Selsdon	Well, it was during the war, at a charity show in Sunderland	Well, she was coming over from Ireland, but she was placed in the poor section and we all know what happened to them"	
49	Lloyd	A little sooner, Selsdon. A shade earlier. A touch closer to yesterday.	...A bit earlier. A smidge closer to yesterday.	
58	Burglar	WC? I'll fix it.	WC? Water closet? I'll fix it.	
62	Frederick	Sorry. It's just frightfully difficult doing a quick-change without a dresser	Sorry. It's just quite difficult doing a quick-change without an assistant"	
63	Lloyd	Right, can we... What's going to be left of this show when I've gone off to do Richard III	"What's going to be left of this show when I've gone back to New York to do Richard III"	
64	Lloyd	What's that, Dad? Right...Brooke, love...very classy places up in London...get a tea break	Brooke, dear...very classy places up in New York...get a coffee break	
65	Dotty	It's usually Poppy, isn't it, love	It's usually Poppy, isn't it?	
66	Belinda	Hush, love	Hush.	
66	Dotty	Is she alright, love?	Is she alright, Lloyd?	
67	Lloyd	...Need that tea break	...Need that coffee break	
		<b>Act 2</b>		
69	Poppy	Act One beginners, please.	Act One places, please.	
69	Poppy	Act One beginners, please.	Act One places, please.	
69	Tim	And maybe Act One beginners is what we'll get.	And maybe Act One places is what we'll get.	
69	Poppy	...together now we've called Beginners.	...together now we've called places.	
70	Tim (Top of Page)	...to Ashton-under-Lyne...to Stockton-on-Tees	"...to Philadelphia...to New York	
71	Lloyd	I just want...then I'm on the 7:25 back to Wales	...then I'm on the 7:25 back to New York	
71	Tim	Right. They've had some kind of row	some kind of fight	
71	Lloyd	You've called Beginners?	You've called places	
71	Tim	She's had bust-ups with Garry before , of course	She's broken up with Garry before, of course	
71	Lloyd	Brooke's had a bust-up with Garry?	Brooke broke up with Garry?	
71	Tim	I mean, they had the famous bust-up...we were playing Worksop	I mean, they had the famous break-up...when we were playing Chicago	
71	Tim	She went out with this journalist bloke	She went out with this journalist guy	
72	Lloyd	Tim, let me...sucking boiled sweets...a commercial for Madeira...	Tim, let me...chewing gum...a commercial for Almond Joy	
72	Lloyd	Have you done the front-of-house calls?	Have you done the house warning?	
72	Tim	Oh, the front-of-house calls!	Oh, the house warning!	
72	Poppy	...started the front of house calls yet...	...started the house warning yet...	
74	Frederick	No, no...she came back to my digs afterwards for a cup of tea	...came back to my flat afterwards for a cup of coffee	

77	Lloyd	I'm not here! I'm at the Aberystwyth Festival!	I'm not here! I'm in New York!	
77	Lloyd	We're having great...there are old-age pensioners out there... we all start for the gents...	...there are senior citizens out there...we all start for the bathroom...	
80	Belinda	Nevermind, my love	Nevermind, dear	
81	Belinda	Understudy rehearsal, my love	Understudy rehearsal, my dear	
81	Belinda	Dotty, my love	Dotty, my dear	
81	Selsdon	Come on, old girl!	Come on, girl!	
82	Belinda	Hush, love.	Hush, dear.	
82	Poppy	There's quite a crowd at the front of the back stalls.	There's quite a crowd out there.	
83	Lloyd	Then take ten pounds of your own money,	Then take ten dollars of your own money,	
82	Selsdon	Come on, girl, get the tabs up! Some of those OAPs out there haven't got long to go.	Come on, girl, get your nerve up! Some of those old folks haven't got long to go.	
130	Poppy	Where it says "she whispers urgently to him." in the stage direction	No, no, no, I'm not going to be brushed off, I'm going to tell you because as soon as that curtain goes down, you'll be seeing her, I know that. Well, she's being difficult, isn't she-- I saw you with that catuacs, I'm not blind. And then you'll be on the next train back to New York. I'm afraid I'm starting to know the way you operate, Lloyd and I bet there's someone else, even, in Richard III, isn't there, but you just can't walk away from it this time!	
133	Tim	Good evening... Welcome to the Old Fishmarket Theatre, Lowestoft, or rather the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees...	TBD	

## Author's Note

This play has gone through many different forms and versions. Here, to avoid any mysteries or confusions, is a brief history.

It began life as a short one-acter entitled *Exits*, commissioned by the late Martin Tickner, for a midnight matinee of the Combined Theatrical Charities at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on 10 September 1977, where it was directed by the late Eric Thompson, and played by Denis Quilley, Patricia Routledge, Edward Fox, Dinsdale Landen, and Polly Adams. Michael Codron thereupon commissioned a full-length version, and waited for it with intermittent patience. Michael Blakemore, the director, persuaded me to rethink and restructure the resulting text, and suggested a great many ideas which I incorporated.

After the play had opened at the Lyric, Hammersmith, in 1982, I did a great deal more rewriting. I went on rewriting, in fact, until Nicky Henson, who was playing Garry, announced on behalf of the cast (rather as Garry himself might have done), that they would learn no further versions.

The play transferred to the Savoy Theatre, and ran until 1987, with five successive casts. For two of the cast-changes I did more rewrites. I also rewrote for the production in Washington in 1983, and I rewrote again when this moved to Broadway.

Reading the English text that has been in use in the past decade and a half I have discovered a series of bizarre misprints, and I suspect that directors have been driven to some quite outlandish devices to make sense of them. What's happened to it in other languages I can for the most part only guess. I know that in France it has been played under two different titles (sometimes simultaneously), and in Germany under four. I imagine that it's often been freely adapted to local circumstances, in spite of the prohibitions in the contract. In France, certainly, my British actors and the characters they are playing turned into Frenchmen, in Italy into Italians (who introduced a 'Sardine Song' between the acts). In Barcelona they were Catalan-speaking actors playing Spanish-speaking characters; in Tampere, in northern Finland, they were robust northerners speaking the Tampere dialect and playing effete southerners with Helsinki accents. On the Japanese poster they all appear to be Japanese; on the Chinese poster Chinese. In Prague they performed the play for some ten years without Act Three, and no one noticed until I arrived.

For the revival at the National Theatre in 2000 I've rewritten yet again. Some of the changes are ones that I've been longing to make myself - there's nothing like having to sit through a play twelve million times to make your fingers itch for the delete key. Many other changes were suggested by the radical criticisms and irresistible inventions of my new director, Jeremy Sams. I hope that no one will consciously notice the difference, but if I have demolished any particularly cherished errors or suggestive inconsistencies I apologise.

ACT ONE: The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.  
*(Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare. Monday January 14)*

ACT ONE: The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.  
*(Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne. Wednesday matinee, February 13)*

ACT ONE: The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.  
*(Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees. Saturday April 6)*

There is an interval between Act One and Act One. There is no interval between  
Act One and Act One.

The cast of *Noises Off* are performing another play, *Nothing On*. The casting in *Nothing On* is as follows:

MRS CLACKETT	Dotty Otley
ROGER TRAMPLEMAIN	Garry Lejeune
VICKI	Brooke Ashton
PHILIP BRENT	Frederick Fellowes
FLAVIA BRENT	Belinda Blair
BURGLAR	Selsdon Mowbray
SHEIKH	Frederick Fellowes

<i>Director</i>	Lloyd Dallas
<i>Company and StageManager</i>	
	Tim Allgood
<i>Assistant StageManager</i>	
	Poppy Norton-Taylor

The action takes place in the living-room of the Brents' country home, on a Wednesday afternoon.

**ACT I**

*The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

*(Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare, Monday January 14)*

*From the estate agent's description of the property:*

*A delightful 16th-century posset mill, 25 miles from London. Lovingly converted, old-world atmosphere, many period features. Fully equipped with every aid to modern living, and beautifully furnished throughout by owner now resident abroad. Ideal for overseas company seeking perfect English setting to house senior executive. Minimum three months let. Apply sole agents: Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley*

*THE ACCOMMODATION COMPRISES: an open-plan living area, with a staircase leading to a gallery. A notable feature is the extensive range of entrances and exits provided. On the ground floor the front door gives access to the mature garden and delightful village beyond. Another door leads to the elegant panelled study, and a third to the light and airy modern service quarters. A fourth door opens into a luxurious bathroom/WC suite, and a full-length south-facing window affords extensive views. On the gallery level is the door to the master bedroom, and another to a small but well-proportioned linen cupboard. A corridor gives access to all the other rooms in the upper parts of the house. Another beautifully equipped bathroom/WC*



*suite opens off the landing halfway up the stairs*

*All in all, a superb example of the traditional English set-builder's craft - a place where the discerning theatregoer will feel instantly at home*

*Introductory music. As the curtain rises, the award-winning modern telephone is ringing*

*Enter from the service quarters Mrs Clackett, a housekeeper of character. She is carrying an imposing plate of sardines*

**Mrs Clackett**

It's no good you going on. I can't open sardines *and* answer the phone. I've only got one pair of feet.

*She puts the sardines down on the telephone table by the sofa, and picks up the phone*

Hello... Yes, but there's no one here, love... No, Mr Brent's not here... He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain... Mr Philip Brent, that's right... The one who writes the plays, that's him, only now he writes them in Spain... No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here... Am I in Spain? No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with, because it's the royal what's it called on the telly - the royal you know - where's the paper, then...?

*She picks up the newspaper lying on the sofa and*

*searches in it.*

... And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house-agents, because they're the agents for the house... Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one...? No, they're not in Spain, they're next to the phone in the study. Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, I'll go and look.

*She replaces the receiver*

*Or so the stage-directions say in Robin Housemongers play, 'Nothing On'. In fact, though, she puts the receiver down beside the phone instead*

Always the same, isn't it. Soon as you take the weight off your feet, down it all comes on your head.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper*

*Or so the stage-direction says. In fact she moves off holding the plate of sardines instead of the newspaper. As she does so, Dotty Otley, the actress who is playing the part of Mrs Clackett, comes out of character to comment on the move*

**Dotty**

And I take the sardines. No, I leave the sardines.  
No, I take the sardines.

*The disembodied voice of Lloyd Dallas, the director of 'Nothing On', replies from somewhere out in the*



<b>Mrs Clackett</b>	Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, don't go away, I'm putting it down.
	<i>She replaces the receiver</i>
	Always the same, isn't it. Put your feet up for two minutes, and immediately they come running after you.
	<i>Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper</i>

*The sound of a key in the lock*

**Lloyd**

Hold it.

*The front door opens. On the doorstep stands Roger, holding a cardboard box. He is about thirty, and has the well-appointed air of a man who handles high-class real estate*

**Roger**

... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

**Lloyd**

Hold it, Garry. Dotty!

*Enter Vicki through the front door. She is a desirable property in her early twenties, well-built and beautifully maintained throughout*

**Roger**

So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

**Lloyd**

Hold it, Brooke. Dotty!

*Enter Dotty from the study*

## Dotty

Come back?

**Lloyd**

Yes, and go out again with the *newspaper*.

## Dotty

The newspaper? Oh, the newspaper.

**Lloyd**

You put the receiver back, you leave the sardines, and you go out with the newspaper.

Garry Here you are, love.

Dotty Sorry, love.

Garry *(embraces her)* Don't worry, love. It's only the technical.

Lloyd It's the dress, Garry, honey. It's the dress rehearsal.

Garry So when was the technical?

Lloyd So when's the dress? We open tomorrow!

Garry Well, we're all thinking of it as the technical. *(To Dotty)* Aren't we, love?

Dotty It's all those words, my sweetheart.

Garry Don't worry about the words, Dotty, my pet.

Dotty Coming up like oranges and lemons.

Garry Listen, Dotty, your words are fine, your words are better than the, do you know what I mean? *(To Brooke)* Isn't that right?

Brooke *(her thoughts elsewhere)* Sorry?

Garry *(to Dotty)* I mean, OK, so he's the, you know. Fine. But, Dotty, love, you've been playing this kind of part for,

well, you know what I mean.

**Lloyd** All right? So Garry and Brooke are off, Dotty's holding the receiver...

**Garry** No, but here we are, we're all thinking, my God, we open tomorrow, we've only had a fortnight to rehearse, we don't know where we are, but my God, here we are!

**Dotty** That's right, my sweet. Isn't that right, Lloyd?

**Lloyd** Beautifully put, Garry.

**Garry** No, but we've got to play Weston-super-Mare all the rest of this week, then Yeovil, then God knows where, then God knows where else, and so on for God knows how long, and we're all of us feeling pretty much, you know... *(To Brooke)* I mean, aren't *you*?

**Brooke** Sorry?

**Lloyd** Anyway, you're off, Dotty's holding the receiver ...

**Garry** Sorry, Lloyd. But sometimes you just have to come right out with it. You know?

**Lloyd** I know.

**Garry** Thanks, Lloyd.

**Lloyd** OK, Garry. So you're off ...

**Garry** Lloyd, let me just say one thing. Since we've stopped. I've worked with a lot of directors, Lloyd. Some of them were geniuses. Some of them were bastards. But I've never met one who was so totally and absolutely... I don't know...

**Lloyd** Thank you, Garry. I'm very touched. Now will you get off the fucking stage?

*Exit Garry through the front door*

And, Brooke ...

**Brooke** Yes?

**Lloyd** Are you in?

**Brooke** In?

**Lloyd** Are you there?

**Brooke** What?

**Lloyd** You're out. OK. I'll call again. And on we go.

*Exit Brooke through the front door*

So there you are, holding the receiver.

**Dotty** So there I am, holding the receiver. I put the receiver back and I leave the sardines.

<b>Mrs Clackett</b> Always the same story, isn't it ...
---



Lloyd

And you take the newspaper.

*She comes back, and picks up the newspaper and the receiver*

Dotty

I leave the sardines, I take the newspaper.

Mrs Clackett

Always the same story, isn't it. It's a weight off your mind, it's a load off your stomach.

Dotty

And off at last I go.

Lloyd

Leaving the receiver.

*She replaces the receiver and goes off into the study.  
Enter Roger as before, with the cardboard box*

Roger

... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

*Enter Vicki as before*

So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

*Roger goes back and brings in a flight bag, and closes the front door*

I'll just check.

*He opens the door to the service quarters. Vicki gazes round*

	Hello? Anyone at home?
	<i>Closes the door</i>
	No, there's no one here. So what do you think?
Vicki	Great. And this is all yours?
Roger	Just a little shack in the woods, really. Converted posset mill. Sixteenth-century.
Vicki	It must have cost a bomb.
Roger	Well, one has to have somewhere to entertain one's business associates. Someone coming at four o'clock, in fact. Arab sheikh. Oil. You know.
Vicki	Right. And I've got to get those files to our Basingstoke office by four.
Roger	Yes, we'll only just manage to fit it in. I mean, we'll only just do it. I mean...
Vicki	Right, then.
Roger	<i>(putting down the box and opening the flight bag)</i> We won't bother to chill the champagne.
Vicki	All these doors!
Roger	Oh, only a handful, really.

		<i>He opens the various doors one after another to demonstrate.</i>
		Study... Kitchen.. And a self-contained service flat for the housekeeper.
Vicki		Terrific. And which one's the ... ?
Roger		What?
Vicki		You know ...
Roger		The usual offices? Through here.
		<i>He opens the downstairs bathroom door for her</i>
Vicki		Fantastic.
		<i>Exit Vicki into the bathroom</i>
		<i>Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, without the newspaper</i>
Mrs Clackett		Now I've lost the sardines ...
		<i>Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom, and slips the champagne back into the bag</i>
Roger		I'm sorry. I thought there was no one here.

Mrs Clackett	I'm not here. I'm off, only it's the royal you know, where they wear those hats, and they're all covered in fruit, and who are you?
Roger	I'm from the agents.
Mrs Clackett	From the agents?
Roger	Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.
Mrs Clackett	Oh. Which one are you, then? Squire, Squire, Hackham, or Dudley?
Roger	I'm Tramplemain.
Mrs Clackett	Walking in here as if you owned the place! I thought you was a burglar.
Roger	No, I just dropped in to... go into a few things...
	<i>The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it</i>
	Well, to check some of the measurements...
	<i>The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it</i>
	Do one or two odd jobs...
	<i>The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it</i>
	Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective tenant over the

house.

*The bathroom door opens.*

**Vicki** What's wrong with this door?

*Roger closes it.*

**Roger** She's thinking of renting it. Her interest is definitely aroused.

*Enter Vicki from bathroom*

**Vicki** That's not the bedroom.

**Roger** The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the housekeeper, Mrs Crockett.

**Mrs Clackett** Clackett, dear, Clackett.

**Vicki** Oh. Hi.

**Roger** She's not really here.

**Mrs Clackett** Only it's the royal, you know, with the hats.

**Roger** *(to Mrs Clackett)* Don't worry about us.

**Mrs Clackett** *(picks up the sardines)* I'll have the sound on low.

**Roger** We'll just inspect the house.

**Mrs Clackett**            Only now I've lost the newspaper.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, carrying the sardines*

*Only she leaves them behind*

**Lloyd**                            Sardines!

**Roger**                            I'm sorry about this.

**Vicki**                            That's all right. We don't want the television, do  
we?

**Lloyd**                            Sardines!

*Enter Dotty from the study*

**Dotty**                            I've forgotten the sardines.

**Garry**                            Lloyd! These sardines! They're driving us all mad!

**Lloyd**                            Something wrong with the sardines? Poppy!

**Garry**                            There's four plates of sardines coming on in Act One  
alone! They go here, they go there. *She* takes them - / take  
them. *(To Brooke)* I mean, don't *you* feel, you know?

**Brooke**                            *(elsewhere again)* Sorry?

**Garry**                            The sardines.

**Brooke** What sardines?

*Enter Poppy, the assistant stage manager, from the wings*

Poppy Change the sardines?

**Lloyd** Make it four grilled turbot. Off the bone.

**Garry** *(to Lloyd)* OK, it's all right for you. You're sitting out there. We're up here. We've got to *do* it. Plus we've got bags, we've got boxes. Plus doors. Plus words. You know what I mean?

**Dotty** We're not getting at you, Poppy, love. We think the sardines are lovely.

**Garry** I'm just trying to, you know.

**Lloyd** So what *do* you want to change, Garry? The bags? The boxes? The doors?

**Dotty** We can't start *changing* things now, love!

**Garry** I'm just *saying*. Words. Doors. Bags. Boxes. Sardines. *Us*. OK? I've made my point?

[illegible]

Poppy Um. Well.

**Lloyd** Right. On we go. From Dotty's exit. And  
Poppy ...

Poppy Yes?

Lloyd Don't let this happen again.

Poppy Oh. No.

*Exit Poppy into the wings*

Garry Sorry, Lloyd. I just thought we ought to, do you know what I mean?

Lloyd Of course.

Garry Better out than, you know.

Lloyd Much better. As long as Dotty's happy.

Dotty Absolutely happy, Lloyd, my love.

*She goes to the study door.*

Lloyd Will you do something for me then, Dotty, my precious?

Dotty Anything, Lloyd, my sweet.

Lloyd Take the sardines off with you.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into study, carrying the sardines*

Roger I'm sorry about this.





**Mrs Clackett**                    Sardines ... Sardines ... It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it - take the plunge. You'll really enjoy it here.

**Vicki**    Oh. Great.

**Mrs Clackett**                    *(to Roger)* Won't she, love?

**Roger**    Yes. Well. Yes!

**Mrs Clackett**                    *(to Vicki)* And we'll enjoy having you. *(To Roger)* Won't we, love?

**Roger**    Oh. Well.

**Vicki**    Terrific.

**Mrs Clackett**                    Sardines, sardines. Can't put your feet up on an empty stomach, can you.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to service quarters*

**Vicki**    You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

**Roger**    Well...

**Vicki**    I think she's terrific.

**Roger**    Terrific.



This one, this one.

*He drops the bag and box and struggles nervously to open the second door along the gallery, the bedroom*

**Vicki** Oh, you're in a real state! You can't even get the door open.

*Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the bedroom*

*Only they can't, because the bedroom door won't open*

*The sound of a key in the lock, and the front door opens. On the doorstep stands Philip, carrying a cardboard box. He is in his forties, with a deep suntan, and writes attractive new plays with a charming period atmosphere*

**Philip** ... No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.

**Lloyd** Hold it.

*Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Garry's. She is in her thirties, the perfect companion piece to the above*

**Lloyd** Hold it.

**Philip** We've got the place entirely to ourselves.

*Philip closes the door*



honestly, she loves technicals! Dotty! Where's Dotty?

**Belinda** Everyone's always so nice to everyone.

**Garry** Oh! Isn't she just, I mean, she really is, isn't she.

*Enter Dotty from the service quarters*

*(To Dotty)* Belinda's being all, you know.

**Belinda** But Freddie, my precious, don't *you* like a nice all-night technical?

**Frederick** The only thing I like about technicals is you get a chance to sit on the furniture.

*He sits*

**Belinda** Oh, Freddie, my precious! It's lovely to see you cheering up and making jokes.

*She sits beside him, and embraces him*

**Frederick** Oh, was that a joke?

**Belinda** This is such a lovely company to work with. It's such a happy company.

**Dotty** Wait till we've got to Stockton-on-Tees in twelve weeks time.

**Belinda** Are you all right, Lloyd, my precious?

**Lloyd** I'm starting to know what God felt like when he sat out there in the darkness creating the world. (*He takes a pill*)

**Belinda** What did he feel like, Lloyd, my love?

**Lloyd** Very pleased he'd taken his Valium.

**Belinda** He had six days, of course. We've only got six hours.

**Lloyd** And God said, 'Where the fuck is Tim?'

*Enter from the wings Tim, the company stage manager.  
He is exhausted*

And there the fuck *was* Tim. And God said, 'Let there be doors, that open when they open, and close when they close.'

**Tim** Do something?

**Lloyd** Doors.

.

**Tim** I was doing the front of house.

**Lloyd** Doors.

**Tim** Doors?

**Lloyd** Tim, are you fully awake?

**Belinda** Lloyd, he *has* been putting the set up all weekend.

**Garry** And the bedroom won't, you know.

**Belinda** (to Lloyd) He hasn't been to bed for forty-eight hours.

*Lloyd comes up on stage*

Lloyd Listen. Since we've stopped anyway. OK, it took two days to get the set up, so we shan't have time for a dress rehearsal. Don't worry. Think of the first night as a dress rehearsal. If we can just get through the play once tonight for doors and sardines. That's what it's all about. Doors and sardines. Getting on - getting off. Getting the sardines on - getting the sardines off. That's farce. That's the theatre. That's life.

**Lloyd** So just keep going. Bang, bang, bang. Bang you're on. Bang you've said it. Bang you're off. And everything will be perfectly where's Selsdon?



**Belinda** Oh no!

**Garry** Not already?

**Belinda** Selsdon!

**Garry** Selsdon!

**Lloyd** Poppy!

**Dotty** *(to Lloyd)* I thought he was in front, with you?

**Lloyd** I thought he was round the back, with you?

*Enter Poppy from the wings*

Is Mr Mowbray in his dressing-room?

*Exit Poppy into the wings*

**Frederick** Oh, I don't think he would. Not at a technical. *(To Brooke)* Would he?

**Brooke** Would who?

**Garry** Selsdon. We can't find him!

**Frederick** I'm sure he wouldn't. Not at a technical.

**Dotty** Half a chance, he would.

**Brooke** Would what?

*Garry, Dotty and Lloyd make gestures to her of tipping a glass, or raising the elbow, or screwing the nose*

**Belinda** Now come on, my sweets, be fair! We don't know.

**Frederick** Let's not jump to any conclusions.

**Lloyd** Let's just get the understudy dressed. Tim!

**Tim** Yes?

**Lloyd** Hurry up with those doors. You're going on as the Burglar.

**Tim** Oh. Right.

**Dotty** He shouldn't have been out of sight! I said, he must never be out of sight!

**Belinda** He's been as good as gold all the way through rehearsals.

**Garry** Yes, because in the rehearsal room it was all, I don't know, but there we were, do you know what I mean?

**Lloyd** There was no set. You could see everyone.

**Garry** And here it's all, you know.

**Lloyd** Split into two. There's a front and a back. And instantly we've lost him.



**Lloyd** I cast him.

**Dotty** 'Let's give him one last chance,' I said. 'One last chance!' I mean, what can you do? We were in weekly rep together in Peebles.

**Garry** *(to Dotty)* It's my fault, my precious. I shouldn't have let you. This tour for her isn't just, do you know what I mean? This is her life savings!

**Lloyd** We know that, Garry, love.

*Belinda puts a hand on Dotty's arm*

**Dotty** I'm not trying to make my fortune.

**Frederick** Of course you're not, Dotty.

**Dotty** I just wanted to put a little something by.

**Belinda** We know, love.

**Garry** Just something to buy a little house that she could I mean, come on, that's not so much to ask.

*Brooke puts a hand to her eye.*

**Belinda** *(to Brooke)* Don't *you* cry, my sweet! It's not *your* fault!

**Brooke** No, I've got something behind my lens.

**Frederick** Yes, you couldn't expect Brooke to keep anyone in sight.

**Dotty** *(pointing at Selsdon without seeing him)*. But he was standing right there in the stalls before we started! I saw him!

**Brooke** Who are we talking about now?

**Belinda** It's all right, my sweet. We know you can't see anything.

**Brooke** You mean *Selsdon*? I'm not *blind*. I can see *Selsdon*.

*They all turn and see him*

**Belinda** Selsdon!

**Garry** Oh my God, he's here all the time!

**Lloyd** Standing there like Hamlet's father.

**Frederick** My word, Selsdon, you gave us a surprise. We thought you were... We thought you were... not there.

**Dotty** Where have you been, Selsdon?

**Belinda** Are you all right, Selsdon?

**Lloyd** Speak to us!

**Selsdon** Is it a party?

**Belinda** 'Is it a party?'

**Selsdon** Is it? How killing! I got it into my head there was going to be a rehearsal.

*He goes up on to the stage*

I was having a little postprandial snooze at the back of the stalls so as to be ready for the rehearsal.

**Belinda** Isn't he lovely?

**Lloyd** Much lovelier now we can see him.

**Selsdon** So what are we celebrating?

**Belinda** 'What are we celebrating?'

*Enter Tim from the wings*

**Tim** I've looked all through his dressing-room. I've looked all through the wardrobe. I can't find the gear.

*Lloyd indicates Selsdon*

Oh.

**Selsdon** Beer? In the wardrobe?

**Lloyd** No, Selsdon. Tim, you need a break. Why don't you sit down quietly upstairs and do all the company's VAT?

Tim VAT, right.

Lloyd *(discreetly)* And Tim - just in case he and the gear *do* walk off together one night, order yourself a spare Burglar costume.

Tim Spare Burglar costume.

Lloyd *Two* spare Burglar costumes. One to fit you, one to fit Poppy. I want a plentiful supply of spare Burglars on hand for any eventuality.

Tim Two spare Burglars.

*Exit Tim into the wings*

Belinda He has been on his feet for forty-eight hours, Lloyd.

Lloyd *(calling)* Don't fall down, Tim. We may not be insured.

Selsdon So what's next on the bill?

Lloyd Well, Selsdon, I thought we might try a spot of rehearsal.

Selsdon Oh, I won't, thank you.

Lloyd You *won't*?

Selsdon You all go ahead. I'll sit and watch you. This is the beer in the wardrobe, is it?

**Belinda**                                No, my sweet, he wants us to rehearse.

**Selsdon**                                Yes, but I think we've got to rehearse, haven't we?

**Lloyd**                                        Rehearse, yes! Well done, Selsdon. I knew you'd think of something. Right, from Belinda and Freddie's entrance...

*Enter Poppy from the wings, alarmed.*

**Poppy**                                        Lloyd...

**Lloyd**                                        What? What's happened now?

**Poppy**                                        The police!

**Lloyd**                                        The *police*?

**Poppy**                                        They've found an old man. He was lying unconscious in a doorway just across the street.

**Lloyd**                                        Oh. Yes. Thank you.

**Poppy**                                        They say he's very dirty and rather smelly, and I thought oh my God, because...

**Lloyd**                                        Thank you, Poppy.

**Poppy**                                        Because when you get close to Selsdon...

**Belinda**                                        Poppy!



**Poppy**                                No, I mean, if you stand anywhere near Selsdon you can't help noticing this very distinctive...

*She stops, sniffing*

**Selsdon**                                *(putting his arm round her)* I'll tell you something, Poppy. Once you've got it in your nostrils you never forget it. Sixty years now and the smell of the theatre still haunts me.

*Exit Selsdon into the study*

**Belinda**                                Oh, bless him!

**Lloyd**                                        Tell me, Poppy, love - how did you get a job like this, that requires tact and understanding? You're not somebody's girl-friend, are you?

*Poppy gives him a startled look*

**Belinda**                                Don't worry, Poppy, my sweet. He truly did not hear.

*Enter Selsdon from the study*

**Selsdon**                                *Not* here?

**Lloyd**                                        Yes, yes, there!

**Belinda**                                Sit down, my precious.

**Dotty**                                        Go back to sleep.

**Lloyd**                                        You're not on for another twenty pages yet.

*Exit Selsdon into the study. Exit Poppy into the wings*

**Lloyd**

And on we go.

*He goes back down into the auditorium*

Dotty in the kitchen, wildly roasting sardines. Freddie and Belinda waiting impatiently outside the front door. Garry and Brooke disappearing tremulously into the bedroom. Time sliding irrevocably into the past.

*Exeunt Dotty into the service quarters, Garry and Brooke upstairs into the bedroom, and Frederick through the front door.*

**Belinda**

*(to Lloyd, with lowered voice)* Aren't they sweet?

**Lloyd**

What?

**Belinda**

*(points to the bedroom and the service quarters)* Garry and Dotty.

**Lloyd**

Garry and Dotty?

**Belinda**

Sh!

**Lloyd**

*(lowers his voice)* What? You mean they're an item? Those two? Tramplemain and Mrs Clackett?

**Belinda**

It's supposed to be a secret.

**Lloyd** But she's old enough to be...

**Belinda** Sh! Didn't you know?

**Lloyd** I'm just God, Belinda, love. I'm just the one with the English degree, I don't know anything.

*Enter Garry from the bedroom*

**Garry** What's happening?

**Lloyd** I don't like to imagine, Garry, honey.

*Exit Belinda through the front door*

**Garry** I mean, what are we waiting for?

*Enter Dotty from the service quarters, inquiringly*

**Lloyd** I don't know what you're waiting for, Garry. Her sixteenth birthday?

**Garry** What?

**Lloyd** Or maybe just the cue. Brooke!

*Exit Dotty to the service quarters*

*Enter Brooke from the bedroom*

'Oh, you're in a real state.'

<b>Vicki</b>	Oh, you're in a real state! You can't even get the door open.
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<b>Lloyd</b>	Door closed, love.
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*Garry closes the door*

<b>Vicki</b>	You can't even get the door open.
--------------	-----------------------------------

	<i>Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the bedroom</i>
--	--

	<i>Enter Philip through the front door</i>
--	--

<b>Philip</b>	No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.
---------------	--

	<i>Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Garry's.</i>
--	--

	We've got the place entirely to ourselves.
--	--

	<i>Philip closes the door</i>
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<b>Flavia</b>	Home!
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<b>Philip</b>	Home, sweet home!
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<b>Flavia</b>	Dear old house!
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<b>Philip</b>	Just waiting for us to come back!
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<b>Flavia</b>	It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!
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**Philip** It's damned serious! If Inland Revenue find out we're in the country, even for one night, bang goes our claim to be resident abroad. Bang goes most of this year's income. I feel like an illegal immigrant.

**Flavia** I'll tell you what I feel like.

**Philip** Champagne? *(He takes a bottle out of the box)*

**Flavia** I wonder if Mrs Clackett's aired the beds.

**Philip** Darling!

**Flavia** Well, why not? No children. No friends dropping in. We're absolutely on our own.

**Philip** True. *(He picks up the bag and box and ushers Flavia towards the stairs)* There is something to be said for being a tax exile.

**Flavia** Leave those!

*He drops the bag and box and kisses her. She flees upstairs, laughing, and he after her*

**Philip** Sh!

**Flavia** What?

**Philip** *(humorously)* Inland Revenue may hear us!

*They creep to the bedroom door*

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters carrying a fresh plate of sardines*

**Mrs Clackett**      *(to herself)* What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

*She puts the sardines on the telephone table and sits on the sofa*

**Philip and Flavia**      *(looking down from the gallery)* Mrs Clackett!

*Mrs Clackett jumps up*

**Mrs Clackett**      Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of my boots!

**Philip**                                      So did mine!

**Flavia**                                      We thought you'd gone!

**Mrs Clackett**      I thought you was in Spain!

**Philip**                                      We are! We are!

**Flavia**                                      You haven't seen us!

**Philip**                                      We're not here!

**Mrs Clackett**      Oh, like that, is it? The income tax are after you?

**Flavia** They would be, if they knew we were here.

**Mrs Clackett** All right, then, love. You're not here. I haven't seen you. Anybody asks for you, I don't know nothing. Off to bed, are you?

**Philip** Oh...

**Flavia** Well...

**Mrs Clackett** That's right. Nowhere like bed when they all get on top of you. You'll want your things, look. *(She indicates the bag and box)*

**Philip** Oh. Yes. Thanks.

*He comes downstairs, and picks up the bag and box*

**Mrs Clackett** *(to Flavia)* Oh, and that bed hasn't been aired, love.

**Flavia** I'll get a hot water bottle.

*Exit Flavia into the mezzanine bathroom*

**Mrs Clackett** I've put all your letters in the study, dear.

**Philip** Letters? What letters? You forward all the mail, don't you?

**Mrs Clackett** Not the ones from the income tax, dear. I don't want to spoil your holidays.

Philip	Oh good heavens! Where are they?
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Mrs Clackett	I've put them all in the pigeonhouse.
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Philip	In the <i>pigeonhouse</i> ?
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Mrs Clackett	In the little pigeonhouse in your desk, love.
--------------	---

<i>Exeunt Mrs Clackett and Philip into the study. Philip is still holding the bag and box</i>	
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*Only he remains on, and Dotty remains in the doorway waiting for him*

<i>Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie</i>	
---	--

Roger	Yes, but I could hear voices!
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<i>Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear</i>	
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Vicki	Voices? What sort of voices?
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Lloyd	Hold it. Freddie, what's the trouble?
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Frederick	Lloyd, you know how stupid I am about moves. Sorry, Garry... Sorry, Brooke... It's just my usual dimness. <i>(To Lloyd)</i> But why do I take the things off into the study? Wouldn't it be more natural if I left them on?
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Lloyd	No.
-------	-----



**Frederick** I thought it might be somehow more logical.

**Lloyd** No.

**Freddie** Lloyd, I know it's a bit late in the day to go into all this...

**Lloyd** Freddie, we've got several more minutes left before we open.

*Enter Belinda from the mezzanine bathroom, to wait patiently*

**Frederick** Thank you, Lloyd. As long as we're not too pushed. But I've never understood why he carries an overnight bag and a box of groceries into the study to look at his mail.

**Garry** Because they have to be out of the way for my next scene!

**Frederick** I see that.

**Belinda** And Freddie, my sweet, Selsdon needs them in the study for *his* scene.

**Frederick** I see that...

**Lloyd** *(comes up on stage)* Selsdon... where is he? Is he there?

**Belinda** *(calling, urgently)* Selsdon!

**Dotty** *(likewise)* Selsdon!

**Garry** (likewise) Selsdon!

*A pane of glass shatters in the mullion window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch. Enter an elderly Burglar. He has great character, but is in need of extensive repair and modernisation.*

**Burglar** No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement...

*He becomes aware of the others.*

No?

**Lloyd** No. Not yet. Thank you, Selsdon.

**Selsdon** I thought I heard my name.

**Lloyd** No, no, no. Back to sleep, Selsdon. Another ten pages before the big moment.

**Selsdon** I'm so sorry.

**Lloyd** Not at all. Nice to see you. Poppy, put the glass back in the window.

*Enter Poppy. She puts the glass back.*

And, Selsdon...

**Selsdon** Yes?

Lloyd Beautiful performance.

Selsdon Oh, how kind of you. I don't think I'm quite there yet, though.

*Exit Selsdon through the window.*

Lloyd He even remembered the line.

Frederick All right, I see all that.

Lloyd *(faintly)* Oh, no!

Frederick I just don't know why I take them.

Lloyd Freddie, love, why does anyone do anything? Why does that other idiot walk out through the front door holding two plates of sardines? *(To Garry)* I'm not getting at you, love.

Garry Of course not, love. *(To Frederick)* I mean, why do I? *(To Lloyd)* I mean, right, when you come to think about it, why do I?

Lloyd Who knows? The wellsprings of human action are deep and cloudy. *(To Frederick)* Maybe something happened to you as a very small child which made you frightened to let go of groceries.

Belinda Or it could be genetic.

Garry Yes, or it could be, you know.

Lloyd    It could well be.

**Frederick** Of course. Thank you. I understand all that. But...

**Lloyd** Freddie, love, I'm telling you - I don't know. I don't think the author knows. I don't know why the author came into this industry in the first place. I don't know why any of us came into it.

**Frederick** All the same, if you could just give me a reason I could keep in my mind...

**Lloyd** All right, I'll give you a reason. You carry those groceries into the study, Freddie, honey, because it's just slightly after midnight, and we're not going to be finished before we open tomorrow night. Correction - before we open *tonight*.

*Frederick nods, rebuked, and exits into the study. Dotty silently follows him. Garry and Brooke go silently back into the bedroom*

*Lloyd returns to the stalls*

And on we go. From after Freddie's exit, *with* the groceries.

**Belinda** *(keeping her voice down)* Lloyd, sweetheart, his wife left him this morning.

Lloyd Oh. *(Pause)* Freddie!

*Enter Frederick, still wounded, from the study*

I think the point is that you've had a great fright when she mentions income tax, and you feel very insecure and exposed, and you want something familiar to hold on to.

**Frederick** *(with humble gratitude)* Thank you, Lloyd. *(He clutches the groceries to his chest.)* That's most helpful.

*Exit Frederick into the study*

**Belinda** *(to Lloyd)* Bless you, my sweet.

**Lloyd** *(leaves the stage)* And on we merrily go.

*Exit Belinda into the mezzanine bathroom*

'Yes, but I could hear voices...'

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie*

**Roger** Yes, but I could hear voices!

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear*

**Vicki** Voices? What sort of voices?

**Roger** People's voices.

**Vicki** But there's no one here.



*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study. She is carrying the first plate of sardines*

**Mrs Clackett**      *(to herself)* Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like a Sunday school outing.

*Roger pushes Vicki through the first available door, which happens to be the linen cupboard*

Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

**Roger**                                      Yes, still poking... well, still around.

**Mrs Clackett**                      In the airing cupboard, were you?

**Roger**                                      No, no.

*The linen cupboard door begins to open. He slams it shut.*

Well, just checking the sheets and pillow-cases. Going through the inventory.

*He starts downstairs*

Mrs Blackett...

**Mrs Clackett**                      Clackett, dear, Clackett.

*She puts down the sardines beside the other sardines*

**Roger**                                      Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house,

	Mrs Clackett?
Mrs Clackett	I haven't seen no one, dear.
Roger	I thought I heard voices.
Mrs Clackett	Voices? There's no voices here, love.
Roger	I must have imagined it.
Philip	<i>(off)</i> Oh good Lord above!

*Roger, with his back to her, picks up both plates of sardines*

Roger	I beg your pardon?
Mrs Clackett	Oh good Lord above, the study door's open.

*She crosses and closes it. Roger looks out of the window*

Roger	There's another car outside! That's not Mr Hackham's, is it? Or Mr Dudley's?
-------	--

*Exit Roger through the front door, holding both plates of sardines*

	<i>Enter Flavia from the mezzanine bathroom, carrying a hot water bottle. She sees the linen cupboard door swinging open as she passes, pushes it shut, and turns</i>
--	---



*the key*

**Flavia**

Nothing but flapping doors in this house.

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom*

*Enter from the study Philip, holding a tax demand and its envelope*

**Philip**

'... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint... proceedings in court...'

**Mrs Clackett**

Oh yes, and that reminds me, a gentleman come about the house.

**Philip**

Don't tell me. I'm not here.

**Mrs Clackett**

He says he's got a lady quite aroused.

**Philip**

Leave everything to Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

**Mrs Clackett**

All right, love. I'll let them go all over, shall I?

**Philip**

Let them do anything. Just so long as you don't tell anyone we're here.

**Mrs Clackett**

So I'll just sit down and turn on the... sardines, I've forgotten the sardines! I don't know - if it wasn't fixed to my shoulders I'd forget what day it was.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to the service quarters*

**Philip** I didn't get this! I'm not here. I'm in Spain. But if I didn't get it I didn't open it.

*Enter Flavia from the bedroom. She is holding the dress that Vicki arrived in*

**Flavia** Darling, I never had a dress like this, did I?

**Philip** *(abstracted)* Didn't you?

**Flavia** I shouldn't buy anything as tarty as this... Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

**Philip** I should never have touched it.

**Flavia** No, it's lovely.

**Philip** Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.

*Exit Philip into study*

**Flavia** Well, I'll put it in the attic, with all the other things you gave me that are too precious to wear.

*Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor*

*Enter Roger through the front door, still carrying both plates of sardines*

**Roger** All right, all right... Now the study door's open again!

What's going on?	
	<i>He puts the sardines down - one plate on the telephone table, where it was before, one near the front door - and goes towards the study, but stops at the sound of urgent knocking overhead</i>
	Knocking!
	<i>Knocking.</i>
	Upstairs!
	<i>He runs upstairs. Knocking</i>
	Oh my God, there's something in the airing cupboard!
	<i>He unlocks it and opens it. Enter Vicki</i>
	Oh, it's you.
Vicki	Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark! With all black sheets and things!
Roger	But, darling, why did you lock the door?
Vicki	Why did <i>I</i> lock the door? Why did <i>you</i> lock the door!
Roger	<i>I</i> didn't lock the door!
Vicki	<i>Someone</i> locked the door!

*Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope, and a tube of glue*

**Brooke** Left.

**Garry** *(calling to people, off)* It's the left one, everybody!

**Omnes** *(off)* Left one!

*Enter Dotty, Belinda, and Poppy*

**Frederick** It could be anywhere.

**Garry** *(looks over the edge of the gallery)* It could have gone over the thing and fallen down, you know, and then bounced somewhere else again.

*Brooke comes downstairs. They all search hopelessly*

**Poppy** Where did you last see it?

**Belinda** She *didn't* see it, poor sweet! It was in her eye!

**Garry** *(coming downstairs)* It was probably on 'Why did I lock the door?' She opens her eyes very sort of, you know. Don't you, my sweet? I always feel I ought to rush forward and -

*He rushes forward, hands held out.*

**Dotty** Mind where you put your feet, my love.

**Frederick** Yes, everyone look under their feet.

**Garry** No one move their feet.

**Belinda** Everyone put their feet back exactly where they were.

**Frederick** Pick your feet up one by one.

*They all trample about, looking under their feet, except Brooke, who crouches with her good eye at floor level.  
Lloyd comes up on stage*

**Lloyd** Brooke, love, is this going to happen during a performance? We don't want the audience to miss their last buses and trains.

**Belinda** She'll just carry on. Won't you, my love?

**Frederick** But can she see anything without them?

**Lloyd** Can she hear anything without them?

**Brooke** *(suddenly realizing that she is being addressed)* Sorry?

*She straightens up sharply. Her head comes into abrupt contact with Poppy's face*

**Poppy** Ugh!

**Brooke** Oh. Sorry.

*Brooke jumps up to see what damage she has done to Poppy, and steps backward on to Garry's hand*

**Garry** Ugh!

**Brooke** Sorry.

*Dotty hurries to his aid*

**Dotty** Oh my poor darling! *(To Brooke)* You stood on his hand!

**Frederick** Oh dear. *(He hurriedly clasps a handkerchief to his nose.)*

**Belinda** Oh, look at Freddie, the poor love!

**Lloyd** What's the matter with *him*?

**Belinda** He's just got a little nosebleed, my sweet.

**Lloyd** A nosebleed? No one touched him!

**Belinda** No, he's got a thing about violence. It always makes his nose bleed.

**Frederick** *(from behind his handkerchief)* I'm so sorry.

**Lloyd** Brooke, sweetheart...

**Brooke** I thought you said something to me.

**Lloyd** Yes. *(He picks up a vase and hands it to her.)*  
Just go and hit the box-office manager with this, and you'll have finished off live theatre in Weston-super-Mare.

**Brooke** Anyway, I've found it.

**Belinda** She's found it!

**Dotty** Where was it, love?

**Brooke** In my eye.

**Garry** In her eye!

**Belinda** *(hugging her)* Well done, my sweet.

Lloyd Not in your left eye?

**Brooke** It had gone round the side.

**Belinda** I knew it hadn't gone far. Are you all right, Poppy, my sweet?

Poppy I think so.

Belinda Freddie?

**Frederick** Fine, fine. *(He gets to his feet, looks in his handkerchief, and has to sit down again.)* I'm so sorry.

Lloyd *Now what?*

**Belinda** He's just feeling a little faint, my love. He's got this thing about... *(She tries to demonstrate.)*

Lloyd This thing about what?

**Belinda** Well, I won't say the word.

*Frederick gets to his feet.*



*Enter Selsdon through the front door*

**Selsdon** I think she might have dropped it out here somewhere.

**Lloyd** Good. Keep looking. Only another five pages,  
**Selsdon.**

*Exit Selsdon through the front door*

'Anyway, we can't stand here like this. - Like what?. - In your underwear. - OK, I'll take it off.'

<b>Roger</b>	In here, in here!  <i>He ushers her into the bedroom</i>
	<i>Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope, and a tube of glue</i>
<b>Philip</b>	Darling, this glue. Is it the sort you can never get unstuck...? Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.
	<i>Exit Philip into the study with the tax demand, envelope, glue and one of the plates of sardines from the telephone table</i>
	<i>Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the hot water bottle. He looks up and down the landing</i>
	<i>Enter Vicki from the bedroom</i>
<b>Vicki</b>	Now what?

**Roger** A hot water bottle! / didn't put it there!

**Vicki** / didn't put it there.

**Roger** Someone in the bathroom, filling hot water bottles.

*Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom*

**Vicki** (*anxious*) You don't think there's something  
creepy going on?

*Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor*

**Flavia** Darling, are you coming to bed or aren't you?

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom*

*Enter Roger and Vicki from the mezzanine bathroom*

**Roger** What did you say?

**Vicki** I didn't say anything.

**Roger** I mean, first the door handle. Now the hot water  
bottle...

**Vicki** I can feel goose-pimples all over.

**Roger** Yes, quick, get something round you.

Vicki	Get the covers over our heads.
-------	--------------------------------

	<i>Roger is about to open the bedroom door</i>
--	--

Roger	Just a moment. What did I do with those sardines?
-------	---

	<i>He goes downstairs. Vicki makes to follow</i>
--	--

--	--

	You - wait here.
--	------------------

Vicki	( <i>uneasily</i> ) You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.
-------	--

Roger	Yes, but this one has been extensively modernized throughout. I can't see how anything creepy would survive oil-fired central heating and...
-------	--

Vicki	What? What is it?
-------	-------------------

	<i>Roger stares at the telephone table in silence</i>
--	---

--	--

	<i>The bedroom door opens, and Flavia puts Roger's flight bag on the table outside without looking round. The door closes again</i>
--	---

Vicki	What's happening?
-------	-------------------

Roger	The sardines. They've gone.
-------	-----------------------------

Vicki	Perhaps there is something funny going on. I'm going to get into bed and put my head under the...
-------	---

	<i>She freezes at the sight of the flight bag</i>
Roger	I put them there. Or was it <i>there</i> ?
Vicki	Bag ....
	<i>Vicki runs down the stairs to Roger, who is directly underneath the gallery</i>
Roger	I suppose Mrs Sprockett must have taken them away again... What? What is it?
Vicki	Bag!
Roger	Bag?
Vicki	Bag! Bag!
	<i>Vicki drags Roger silently back towards the stairs.</i>
	<i>Enter Flavia from the bedroom with the box of files. She picks up the flight bag as well, and takes them both off along the upstairs corridor.</i>
Roger	What do you mean, bag, bag?
Vicki	Bag! Bag! Bag!
Roger	What bag?

*Vicki sees the empty table outside the bedroom door*

**Vicki** No bag!

**Roger** No bag?

**Vicki** Your bag! Suddenly! Here! Now - gone!

**Roger** It's in the bedroom. I put it in the bedroom.

*Exit Roger into the bedroom*

**Vicki** Don't go in there!

*Enter Roger from the bedroom*

**Roger** The box!

**Vicki** The box!

**Roger** They've both gone!

**Vicki** Oh! My files!

**Roger** What on earth's happening? Where's Mrs Spratchett?

*He starts downstairs. Vicki follows him*

You wait in the bedroom.

**Vicki** No! No! No!

	<i>She runs downstairs</i>
<b>Roger</b>	At least put you dress on!
<b>Vicki</b>	I'm not going in there!
<b>Roger</b>	I'll fetch it for you, I'll fetch it for you!
	<i>Exit Roger into the bedroom</i>
<b>Vicki</b>	Yes, quick - let's get out of here!
	<i>Enter Roger from the bedroom</i>
<b>Roger</b>	Your dress has gone.
<b>Vicki</b>	I'm never going to see Basingstoke again!
	<i>Roger goes downstairs</i>
<b>Roger</b>	Don't panic! Don't panic! There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this. I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening. You wait here... You can't stand here looking like that... Wait in the study... Study, study, study!
	<i>Exit Roger into the service quarters</i>
	<i>Vicki opens the study door. There's a roar of exasperation from Philip, off. She turns and flees</i>

Vicki	Roger! There's a strange figure in there! Where are you?
-------	--

	<i>There is another cry from Philip, off</i>
--	--

	<i>Exit Vicki blindly through the front door</i>
--	--

	<i>Enter Philip from the study. He is holding the tax demand in his right hand, and one of the plates of sardines in his left</i>
--	---

Philip	Darling, I know this is going to sound silly, but...
--------	--

	<i>He struggles to get the tax demand unstuck from his fingers, encumbered by the plate of sardines</i>
--	---

	<i>Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac</i>
--	---

Flavia	Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic.
--------	--

Philip	I can't come to bed! I'm glued to a tax demand!
--------	---

Flavia	Darling, why don't you put the sardines down?
--------	---

	<i>Philip puts the plate of sardines down on the table. But when he takes his hand away the sardines come with it</i>
--	---

Philip	Darling, I'm stuck to the sardines!
--------	-------------------------------------



Philip *(flapping the tax demand)* I've heard of people getting *stuck* with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

<b>Burglar</b>	No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.
----------------	--

*He climbs in*

**Lloyd** All right, Selsdon, hold it. Let's take it again.

**Burglar** No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults!

**Lloyd** Hold it, Selsdon. Hold it!

**Burglar** What am I doing now?

**Lloyd** *Hold it!*

*Enter Poppy from the wings*

**Burglar** I'm breaking into paper bags!

**Poppy** Lloyd wants you to hold it.

*Enter Belinda*

**Burglar** Right, what are they offering... ?

**Belinda** Stop, Selsdon, my love! Wait, my precious!

*Selsdon stops, restrained at last by Belinda's hand on his arm*

**Lloyd** It's like Myra Hess playing on through the air-

raids.

Selsdon                      Stop?

Poppy                        Stop.

Belinda                     Stop.

Lloyd                        Thank you, Belinda. Thank you, Poppy.

*Exeunt Belinda and Poppy*

Selsdon ...

Selsdon                     I met Myra Hess once.

Lloyd                        I think he can hear better than I can.

Selsdon                     I beg your pardon?

Lloyd                        From your entrance, please, Selsdon.

Selsdon                     Well, it was during the war, at a charity show in  
Sunderland...

Lloyd                        Thank you! Poppy!

Selsdon                     Oh, not for me. It stops me sleeping.

*Enter Poppy from the wings*

Lloyd                        Put the glass back once more.

Selsdon                                      Come on again?

Lloyd                                        Right. Only, Selsdon ...

Selsdon                                      Yes?

Lloyd                                        A little sooner, Selsdon. A shade earlier. A touch closer to yesterday. All right? Freddie!

*Enter Frederick.*

*(to Selsdon)* Start moving as soon as Freddie opens the door.

*(To Frederick)* What's the line?

Frederick                                    'I've heard of people getting *stuck* with a problem, but this is ridiculous.'

Lloyd                                        Start moving as soon as you hear the line, 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a *problem*...' '

Frederick                                    'Stuck with a *problem*'?

Lloyd                                        'Stuck with a *problem*, but this is ridiculous.' And I want your arm through that window. Right?

Selsdon                                      Say no more. May I make a suggestion, though? Should I perhaps come on a little earlier?

Lloyd                                        Selsdon ...

Selsdon                                      Only there does seem to be something of a hiatus

**Selsdon** Yes?

**Selsdon** We're obviously thinking along the same lines.

**Lloyd** Am I putting him on or is he putting me on?

**Philip** (*flapping the tax demand*) I've heard of people getting stuck with a *problem*, but this is ridiculous.

*Enter Burglar as before, but on time*

<b>Burglar</b>	No bars, no burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.
----------------	---

No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags! So what are they offering? *(He peers at the television)* One microwave oven.

	<i>He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa</i>
	What? Fifty quid? Hardly worth lifting it.
	<i>He inspects the paintings and ornaments</i>
	Junk ... Junk... If you insist...
	<i>He pockets some small item</i>
	Where's his desk? No, they all say the same thing... They all say the same thing...

**Selsdon** Yes? Line?

**Poppy** *(off)* 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

**Selsdon** What?

**Lloyd** *(wearily)* 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

**Seldon** Hard to what?

**Others** *(variously, off)* 'Adjust to retirement.'

**Selsdon** It's also very hard to hear if everyone talks at once.

	<i>Exit Burglar into the study.</i>
	<i>Enter Roger from the service quarters, followed by Mrs Clackett, who is holding another plate of sardines</i>
<b>Roger</b>	... And the prospective tenant naturally wishes to know if there is any previous history of paranormal phenomena.

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, yes, dear, it's all nice and paranormal.

**Roger** I mean, has anything ever dematerialized before? Has anything ever...?

*He sees the television set on the sofa.*

... flown about?

*Mrs Clackett puts the sardines down on the telephone table, moves the television set back, and closes the front door*

**Mrs Clackett** Flown about? No, the things move themselves on their own two feet, just like they do in any house.

**Roger** I'd better warn the prospective tenant. She is inspecting the study.

*He opens the study door and then closes it again*

There's a man in there!

**Mrs Clackett** No, no, there's no one in the house, love.

**Roger** *(opening the study door)* Look! Look! He's... *searching for something.*

**Mrs Clackett** *(glancing briefly)* I can't see no one.

Roger	You can't see him? But this is extraordinary! And where is my prospective tenant? I left her in there! She's gone! My prospective tenant has disappeared!
-------	---

	<i>He closes the study door, and looks round the living-room. He sees the sardines on the telephone table</i>
--	---

	Oh my God.
--	------------

Mrs Clackett	Now what?
--------------	-----------

Roger	There!
-------	--------

Mrs Clackett	Where?
--------------	--------

Roger	The sardines!
-------	---------------

Mrs Clackett	Oh, the sardines.
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Roger	You can see the sardines?
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Mrs Clackett	I can see the sardines.
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	<i>Roger touches them cautiously, then picks up the plate</i>
--	---

	I can see the way they're going, too.
--	---------------------------------------

Roger	I'm not letting these sardines out of my hand. But where is my prospective tenant?
-------	--

	<i>He goes upstairs, holding the sardines</i>
--	---



<b>Mrs Clackett</b>	I'm going to be opening sardines all night, in and out of here like a cuckoo on a clock.
	<i>Exit Mrs Clackett into the service quarters</i>
<b>Roger</b>	Vicki! Vicki!
	<i>Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom</i>
	<i>Enter Burglar from the study, carrying an armful of silver cups, etc.</i>
<b>Burglar</b>	No, I miss the violence. I miss having other human beings around to terrify...
	<i>He dumps the silverware on the sofa, and exits into the study</i>
	<i>Enter Roger from mezzanine bathroom</i>
<b>Roger</b>	Where's she gone? Vicki?
	<i>Exit Roger into the linen cupboard</i>
	<i>Enter Burglar from the study, carrying Philip's box and bag. He empties the contents of the box out behind the sofa, and loads the silverware into the box</i>
<b>Burglar</b>	It's nice to hear a bit of shouting and screaming around you. All this silence gets you down...

	<i>Enter Roger from the linen cupboard, still holding the sardines</i>
Roger	<i>(calls)</i> Vicki! Vicki!
	<i>Exit Roger into the bedroom</i>
Burglar	I'm going to end up talking to myself...
	<i>Exit the Burglar into study, unaware of Roger</i>
	<i>Enter Philip from the downstairs bathroom. His right hand is still stuck to the tax demand, his left to the plate of sardines</i>
Philip	Darling, this stuff that eats through anything. It eats through <i>trousers!</i>
	<i>He examines holes burnt in the front of them.</i>
	Darling, if it eats through trousers, you don't think it goes on and eats through... Listen, darling, I think I'd better get these trousers off! <i>(He begins to do so, as best he can)</i> Darling, quick, this is an emergency! I mean, if it eats through absolutely anything... Darling, I think I can feel it! I think it's eating through... absolutely everything!
	<i>Enter Roger from the bedroom, still holding the sardines</i>

Roger	There's something evil in this house.
	<i>Philip pulls up his trousers</i>
Philip	<i>(aside)</i> The Inland Revenue!
Roger	<i>(sees Philip, frightened)</i> He's back!
Philip	No!
Roger	No?
Philip	I'm not here.
Roger	He's not there!
Philip	I'm abroad.
Roger	He's walking abroad.
Philip	I must go.
Roger	Stay!
Philip	I won't, thank you.
Roger	Speak!
Philip	Only in the presence of my lawyer.
Roger	Only in the presence of your...? Hold on. You're not

	from the other world!
Philip	Yes, yes - Marbella!
Roger	You're some kind of intruder!
Philip	Well, nice to meet you.
	<i>He waves goodbye with his right hand, then sees the tax demand on it, and hurriedly puts it away behind his back</i>
	I mean, have a sardine.
	<i>He offers the sardines on his left hand. His trousers, unsupported, fall down</i>
Roger	No, you're not! You're some kind of sex maniac! You've done something to Vicki! I'm going to come straight downstairs...!
	<i>Roger comes downstairs and dials 999</i>
Philip	Oh, you've got some sardines. Well, if there's nothing I can offer you...
Roger	This is plainly a matter for the police! <i>(Into the phone)</i> Police!
Philip	... I think I'll be running along.

*He runs, his trousers still round his ankles, out through the front door*

**Roger**                                Come back...! *(Into the phone)* Hello - police?  
Someone has broken into my house! Or rather someone has  
broken into someone's house... No, but he's a sex maniac! I left  
a young woman here, and what's happened to her no one knows!

*Enter Vicki through the window*

**Vicki**                                        There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

**Roger**                                        *(into the phone)* Sorry... the young woman has  
reappeared. *(Hand over phone)* Are you all right?

**Vicki**                                        No, he almost saw me!

**Roger**                                        *(into the phone)* He almost saw her... Yes, but he's a  
burglar as well! He's taken our things!

**Vicki**                                        *(finds Philip's bag and box)* The things are here.

**Roger**                                        *(into the phone)* The things have come back. So we're  
just missing a plate of sardines.

**Vicki**                                        *(finding the sardines left near the front door by  
Roger)* Here are the sardines.

**Roger**                                        *(into the phone)* And we've found the sardines.

**Vicki**                                        This is the police? You want the police here? In  
my underwear?



Burglar	Right, that's downstairs tidied up a bit. <i>(He starts upstairs.)</i> Just give the upstairs a quick going-over for them.
	<i>Exit the Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom.</i>
	<i>Enter Vicki, holding the sardines and a white bathmat, and Roger, carrying the box and bag, from the downstairs bathroom.</i>
Vicki	A bathmat?
Roger	Better than nothing!
Vicki	I can't go around in front of our taxpayers wearing a <i>bathmat</i> !
Roger	The bedroom, then! There must be something in the bedroom!
	<i>He leads the way upstairs.</i>
Vicki	No, no, no, no! I'm not going in that bedroom again!
Roger	I'll look in the bedroom. You look in the other bathroom.
	<i>Exit Roger into the bedroom and Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom</i>
	<i>Enter Philip through the front door</i>

Philip	Darling! Help! Where are you?
	<i>Enter Vicki from the mezzanine bathroom</i>
Vicki	Roger! Roger!
	<i>Exit Philip hurriedly, unseen by Vicki, into the downstairs bathroom</i>
	There's someone in the bathroom now!
	<i>Vicki runs towards the bedrooms, then stops.</i>
Flavia	(off) Oh, darling, I'm finding such lovely things...!
	<i>Vicki turns and runs downstairs instead, as Flavia enters along the upstairs corridor, absorbed in the china tea service she is carrying.</i>
	<i>Vicki exits hurriedly into the downstairs bathroom.</i>
	Do you remember this china tea service -
	<i>Vicki screams, off.</i>
	- that you gave me on the very first anniversary of our...?
	<i>Enter Vicki from the downstairs bathroom. She stops at the sight of Flavia.</i>
	Who are you?



Vicki	Oh, <i>no</i> - it's his wife and dependents!
	<i>She puts her hands over her face</i>
	<i>Enter Philip from the downstairs bathroom, still with his hands encumbered, holding the bathmat now as well, and keeping his trousers up with his elbows</i>
Philip	Excuse me, I think you've dropped your dress!
	<i>Flavia gasps. Philip looks up at the gallery and sees her</i>
	( <i>To Flavia</i> ) Where have you been? I've been going mad! Look at the state I'm in!
	<i>He holds up his hands to show Flavia the state he is in, and his trousers fall down. The tea service slips from Flavia's horrified hands, and rains down on the floor of the living-room below. Philip hurries towards the stairs, trousers round his ankles, his hands extended in supplication</i>
	Darling, honestly!
	<i>Vicki flees before him, comes face to face with Flavia, and takes refuge in the linen cupboard</i>
	She just burst into the room and her dress fell off!
	<i>Exit Flavia, with a cry of pain, along the upstairs</i>

	<i>corridor</i>
	<i>Enter Roger from the bedroom, directly in Philip's path. Philip holds up the bathmat in front of his face. He is invisible to Roger, though, because the latter is holding up a white bedsheet.</i>
<b>Roger</b>	Here, put this sheet on for the moment while I see if there's something in the attic.
	<i>Roger leaves Philip with the sheet and exits along upstairs corridor</i>
	<i>Philip turns to go back downstairs.</i>
	<i>Enter Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom, holding two gold taps</i>
<b>Burglar</b>	One pair gold taps...
	<i>He stops at the sight of Philip</i>
	Oh, my Gawd!
<b>Philip</b>	Who are you?
<b>Burglar</b>	Me? Fixing the taps.
<b>Philip</b>	Tax? Income tax?
<b>Burglar</b>	That's right, governor. In come new taps ... out go old

taps.	
	<i>Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom</i>
Philip	Tax-inspectors everywhere!
Roger	<i>(off)</i> Here you are!
Philip	The other one!
	<i>Exit Philip into the bedroom, holding the bathmat in front of his face</i>
	<i>Enter Roger along the upstairs corridor holding Vicki's dress.</i>
Roger	I've found your dress! It came flying out of the attic at me!
	<i>Exit Roger into mezzanine bathroom</i>
	<i>Enter Philip from the bedroom, trying to pull the bathmat off his head</i>
Philip	Darling! I've got her dress stuck to my head now!
	<i>Enter Roger from the mezzanine bathroom</i>
	<i>Exit Philip into the bedroom</i>
Roger	Another intruder!

*Enter the Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom*

**Burglar** Just doing the taps, governor.

**Roger** Attacks? Not attacks on women?

**Burglar** Try anything, governor, but I'll do the taps on the bath first.

*Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom*

**Roger** Sex maniacs everywhere! Where is Vicki? Vicki ... ?

*Exit Roger into the downstairs bathroom*

*Enter Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom, heading for the front door*

**Burglar** People everywhere! I'm off. A tax on women? I don't know, they'll put a tax on anything these days.

*Enter Roger from the downstairs bathroom. The Burglar stops.*

**Roger** If I can't find her, you're going to be in trouble, you see.

**Burglar** WC? I'll fix it.

*Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom again*

**Roger** Vicki ... ?

*Exit Roger through the front door*

*Enter Philip from the bedroom. The bathmat is still on his head, but is now arranged like a burnous, and he is wrapped in a white bedsheet*

*Enter Vicki from the linen cupboard, enrobed from head to foot in a black bedsheet. They both quietly close the doors behind them.*

**Vicki** Roger!

*(together)*

**Philip** Darling!

*They see each other and start back*

*Enter Roger through the front door*

**Roger** Sheikh! I thought you were coming at four? And this is your charming wife? So you want to see over the house now, do you, Sheikh? Right. Well. Since you're upstairs already...

*Roger goes upstairs*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying a vase*

**Flavia** Him and his floozie! I'll break this over their heads!

**Roger** ... let's start downstairs.

*Roger, Philip and Vicki go downstairs*

Flavia	Who are you? Who are these creatures?
Roger	<i>(to Philip and Vicki)</i> I'm sorry about this. I don't know who she is. No connection with the house, I assure you.
	<i>Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, with another plate of sardines. Roger advances to introduce her</i>
	Whereas this good lady with the sardines, on the other hand...
Mrs Clackett	No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines, 'cause this time I'm eating them.
Roger	... is fully occupied with her sardines, so perhaps the toilet facilities would be of more interest.
	<i>He ushers Philip and Vicki away from Mrs Clackett towards the mezzanine bathroom</i>
Flavia	Mrs Clackett, who are these people?
Mrs Clackett	Oh, we get them all the time, love. They're just Arab sheets.
Roger	I'm sorry about this.
	<i>He opens the door to the mezzanine bathroom</i>
	But in here...
Flavia	<i>Arab sheets?</i>

	<i>Exit Flavia into the bedroom</i>
Roger	In here we have...
	<i>Enter the Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom</i>
Burglar	Ballcocks, governor. Your ballcocks have gone.
Roger	We have him.
	<i>Enter Flavia from the bedroom</i>
Flavia	They're <i>Irish</i> sheets! Irish linen sheets off my own bed!
Mrs Clackett	Oh, the thieving devils!
Roger	In the <i>study</i> , however ...
Mrs Clackett	You give me that sheet, you devil!
	<i>She seizes the nearest sheet, and it comes away in her hand to reveal Vicki</i>
	Oh, and there she stands in her smalls, for all the world to see!
Roger	It's you!
Flavia	It's her!
	<i>Flavia comes downstairs menacingly</i>

*Exit Philip discreetly into the study*

**Burglar**                      It's my little girl!

**Vicki**                              Dad!

*Flavia stops*

*Enter Philip from the study in amazement. (He is now played by a double - Tim)*

**Burglar**                      Our little Vicki, that ran away from home, I thought I'd never see again!

**Mrs Clackett**              Well, would you believe it?

**Vicki**                              *(to Burglar)* What are you doing here like this?

**Burglar**                      What are *you* doing here like *that*?

**Vicki**                              Me? I'm taking our files on tax evasion to Inland Revenue in Basingstoke.

**Philip/Tim**                      Agh!

*He collapses behind the sofa, clutching at his heart, unnoticed by the others*

**Flavia**                              *(threateningly)* So where's my other sheet?

*Enter through the front door the most sought-after of all*



*properties on the market today - a Sheikh. He is wearing Arab robes, and bears a strong resemblance to Philip, since he is also played by Frederick.*

**Sheikh** Ah! A house of heavenly peace! I rent it!

**Roger** Hold on, hold on... I know that face! *(Pulls the Sheikh's burnous aside to reveal his face.)* He isn't a sheikh! He's that sex-maniac!

**Flavia** Yes - it's my husband!

**Sheikh** What?

*They all fall upon him.*

*Frederick's trousers are revealed to be around his ankles.*

**Lloyd** Trousers!

**Mrs Clackett** You take all the clean sheets! *(She tries to pull the robes off him)*

**Sheikh** What? What?

**Lloyd** Trousers! Trousers!

**Vicki** You snatch my bathmat! *(She tries to pull his burnous off him)*

Sheikh What? What? What?

**Flavia** You toss me aside like a broken china doll! (*She hits him*)

**Lloyd** And to cap it all you've got your trousers on!

*Everyone except Seldson finally comes to a halt.*

**Burglar** And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke...

*Even Selsdon becomes aware that the action has ceased.*

**Selsdon** **Stop?**

**Belinda** Stop, stop.

*Lloyd comes up on stage.*

**Lloyd** It's a question of authenticity, you see, Freddie.  
*Do Arab potentates wear trousers under their robes?* I don't  
know. Maybe they do. But not round their ankles, Freddie!  
Not round their ankles!

**Frederick** Sorry. It's just frightfully difficult doing a quick-change without a dresser.

**Lloyd** Get Tim to help you. Tim! Where's Tim? Come on, Tim! Tim!

**Lloyd** No, let it pass. We'll just struggle through on our own. Tim has a sleep behind the sofa, while all the rest of us run round with our trousers round our ankles. OK, Freddie? You'll just have to do the best you can. On we go, then...

**Frederick** May I ask another silly question?

**Lloyd** All my studies in world drama lie at your disposal.

**Frederick** I still don't understand why the Sheikh just happens to be Philip's double.

**Garry** Because he comes in and we all think he's, you know, and we all, I mean, that's the joke.

**Frederick** I see that.

**Belinda** My sweet, the rest of the plot depends on it!

**Frederick** I see that. But it *is* rather a coincidence, isn't it?

**Lloyd** It *is* rather a coincidence, Freddie, yes. Until you reflect that there was an earlier draft of the play, now unfortunately lost to us. And in this the author makes it clear that Philip's father as a young man had travelled extensively in the Middle East.

**Frederick** I see... I *see*!

**Lloyd** You see?

**Frederick** That's very interesting.

**Lloyd** I thought you'd like that.

**Frederick** But will the audience get it?

**Lloyd** You must tell them, Freddie. Looks. Gestures. That's what acting's all about. OK?

**Frederick** Yes. Thank you, Lloyd. Thank you.

**Lloyd** And it will be even more powerful when you do it with no trousers.

**Frederick** Of course. *(Takes his trousers off.)*

**Lloyd** Right, can we just finish the act? From Belinda's beautiful line, 'You toss me aside like a broken china doll!'

*Lloyd returns to the stalls.*

I'm being so clever out here! What's going to be left of this show when I've gone off to do *Richard III* and you're up there on your own? Right - 'You toss me aside like a broken china doll!'

**Flavia** You toss me aside like a broken china doll! *(She hits him)*

**Sheikh** What? What? What?

**Burglar** And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke I won't ask. But I'll tell you one thing, Vicki.

*Pause*

**Lloyd** Brooke!

**Brooke** Sorry ...

**Lloyd** *(with exquisite politeness)* 'What's that, Dad?'

Right. That's the line, Brooke, love. We all know you've worked in very classy places up in London where they let you make the play up as you go along, but we don't want that kind of thing here, do we. Not when the author has provided us with such a considered and polished line of his own. Not at one o'clock in the morning. Not two lines away from the end of Act One. Not when we're just about to get a tea-break before we all drop dead of exhaustion. We merely want to hear the line. *(Suddenly puts his mouth next to Vicki's ear and shouts.)* 'What's that, Dad?' *(All patience and politeness again.)* That's all. Nothing else. I'm not being unreasonable, am I?

*Brooke abruptly turns, runs upstairs, and exits into the mezzanine bathroom*

Exit? Does it say 'exit'?

*The sound of Brooke weeping, off, and running downstairs*

Oh dear, now she's going to wash her lenses away.

*Exit Lloyd through the front door*

**Frederick** *(chastened)* Oh good Lord.

**Selsdon** *(likewise)* A little heavy with the sauce, I thought.

**Garry** I thought it was going to be Poppy when he finally, you know.

**Dotty** It's usually Poppy. Isn't it, love?

*Poppy smiles wanly*

**Frederick** I suppose that was all my fault.

**Garry** But why pick on, you know?

**Dotty** Yes, why Brooke?

**Belinda** I thought it was quite sweet, actually.

**Garry** Sweet?

**Belinda** Trying to pretend they're not having a little thing together.

**Dotty** A little thing? Lloyd and Brooke... ?

**Belinda** Didn't you know?

**Selsdon** Brooke and Lloyd?

**Belinda** Where do you think they've been all weekend?

**Frederick** Good Lord. You mean, that's why he wasn't here when poor old Tim...

*He stops, conscious that Tim is behind the sofa.*

**Dotty** ... put the set up back-to-front.

**Belinda** Sh! Here they come!







Burglar	But I'll tell you one thing, Vicki.
Vicki	<i>(with a murderous look at Lloyd)</i> What's that, Dad?
Burglar	When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a...

**Poppy** (*off, tearful*) Oh... 'A good old-fashioned plate of sardines.'

**Belinda** 'A good old-fashioned plate...'

Burglar	A good old-fashioned plate of...
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Selsdon ... *what?*

*Poppy runs on with the book, Lloyd jumps to his feet,  
Tim jumps up from behind the sofa.*

**Everyone**

**except Selsdon**     *Sardines!*

*Tableau, with raised sardines. The tableau continues.*

**Lloyd**

*And curtain!*

**Poppy**

*(realises, sobs) Oh!*

*She runs hurriedly into the wings*

CURTAIN



## ACT II

*The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

*(Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne. Wednesday matinee, February 13)*

*But this time we are watching the action from behind; the whole set has been turned through 180 degrees. All the doors can be seen - there is no masking behind them. Two stairways lead up to the platform that gives access to the doors on the upper level. Some of the scene inside the living-room is visible through the full-length window. There are also two doors in the backstage fabric of the theatre: one giving access to the dressing-rooms, and the pass door into the auditorium. The usual backstage furnishings, including the prompt corner and props table, chairs for the actors, a fire-point with fire-buckets and fire-axe, etc.*

*Tim is walking anxiously up and down in his dinner jacket*

*Poppy is speaking into the microphone in the prompt corner*

**Poppy**

*(over the tannoy)* Act One beginners, please. Your calls, Miss Otley, Miss Ashton, Mr Lejeune, Mr Fellowes, Miss Blair. Act One beginners, please.

**Tim**

And maybe Act One beginners is what we'll get. What do you think?

**Poppy** (to Tim) Oh, Dotty'll pull herself together now we've called Beginners. Now she knows she's got to be on stage in five minutes. Won't she?

**Tim** Will she?

**Poppy** You know what Dotty's like.

**Tim** We've only been on the road for a month! We've only got to Ashton-under-Lyne! What's it going to be like by the time we've got to Stockton-on-Tees?

**Poppy** If only she'd speak!

**Tim** If only she'd unlock her dressing-room door!  
Look, if Dotty won't go on...

**Poppy** Won't go on?

**Tim** If she won't.

**Poppy** She will.

**Tim** Of course she will.

**Poppy** Won't she?

**Tim** I'm sure she will. But if she *doesn't*...

**Poppy** She must!

**Tim** She will, she will. But if she *didn't*...

**Poppy** I'd have five minutes to change. Four minutes.

**Tim** If only she'd say something.

*The pass door opens cautiously, and Lloyd puts his head around. He closes it again at the sight of Poppy*

**Poppy** I'll have another go. Takes your mind off your own problems, anyway.

*Exit Poppy in the direction of the dressing-rooms*

*Lloyd puts his head back round the door*

**Lloyd** Has she gone?

**Tim** Lloyd! I didn't know you were coming today!

*Lloyd comes in. He is carrying a bottle of whisky*

**Lloyd** I wasn't. I haven't.

**Tim** Anyway, thank God you're here!

**Lloyd** I'm not. I'm in Aberystwyth. I'm in the middle of rehearsing *Richard III*.

**Tim** Dotty and Garry ...

**Lloyd** I don't want anyone to know I'm in.



Tim No, but Dotty and Garry ...

Lloyd I just want two hours alone and undisturbed with Brooke in her dressing room between shows, then I'm on the 7.25 back to Wales. *(Gives Tim the whisky.)* This is for Brooke. Put it somewhere safe. Make sure Selsdon doesn't get his hands on it.

Tim Right. They've had some kind of row...

Lloyd Good, good. *(Takes money out of his wallet and gives it to Tim)* There's a little flower shop across the road from the stage-door. I want you to buy me some very large and expensive-looking flowers.

Tim Right. Now Dotty's locked herself in her dressing-room...

Lloyd Don't let Poppy see them. They're not for Poppy.

Tim No. And she won't speak to anyone...

Lloyd First house finishes just after five, yes? Second house starts at seventhirty?

Tim Lloyd, that's what I'm trying to tell you - there may not *be* a show!

Lloyd She hasn't walked out already?

Tim No one knows *what* she's doing! She's locked in her dressing-room! She won't speak to anyone!

**Lloyd** You've called Beginners?

Tim Yes!

**Lloyd** I can't play a complete love-scene from cold in five minutes. It's not dramatically possible.

**Tim** She's had bust-ups with Garry before, of course.

**Lloyd** Brooke's had a bust-up with Garry?

Tim Brooke? Not Brooke - Dotty!

Lloyd                      Oh, Dotty.

Tim I mean, they had the famous bust-up the week before last, when we were playing Worksop.

**Lloyd** Right, right, you told me on the phone.

Tim She went out with this journalist bloke ...

**Lloyd** Journalist - yes, yes...

**Tim** But you know Garry threatened to kill him?

**Lloyd** Killed him, yes, I know. Listen, don't worry about Dotty - she's got money in the show.

**Tim** Yes, but now it's happened again! Two o'clock this morning I'm woken up by this great banging on my door.

It's Garry. Do I know where Dotty is? She hasn't come home.

**Lloyd**

Tim, let me tell you something about *my* life. I have the Duke of Buckingham on the phone to me for an hour after rehearsal every evening complaining that the Duke of Gloucester is sucking boiled sweets through his speeches. The Duke of Clarence is off for the entire week doing a commercial for Madeira. Richard himself - would you believe? - Richard III? (*He demonstrates*) - has now gone down with a back problem. I keep getting messages from Brooke about how unhappy she is here, and now she's got herself a doctor's certificate for nervous exhaustion - she's going to walk! I have no time to find or rehearse another Vicki. I have just one afternoon, while Richard is fitted for a surgical corset, to cure Brooke of nervous exhaustion, with no medical aids except a little whisky - you've got the whisky? - a few flowers - you've got the money for the flowers? - and a certain faded charm. So I haven't come to the theatre to hear about other people's problems. I've come to be taken out of myself, and preferably not put back again.

**Tim**

Yes, but Lloyd...

**Lloyd**

Have you done the front-of-house calls?

**Tim**

Oh, the front-of-house calls!

*Tim hurries to the microphone in the prompt corner, still holding the money and whisky.*

**Lloyd**

And don't let Poppy see those flowers!

*Exit Lloyd through the pass door*

Tim *(into microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in three minutes.

*Enter Poppy from the dressing-rooms*

Poppy We're going to be so late up!

Tim No luck?

Poppy Belinda's having a go. I haven't even started the front of house calls yet... Money? What's this for?

Tim Nothing, nothing! *(He puts the money behind his back and automatically produces the whisky with the other hand)*

Poppy Whisky!

Tim Oh... is it?

Poppy Where did you find that?

Tim Well...

Poppy Up here? You mean Selsdon's hiding them round the stage now? *(She takes the whisky)*

Tim Oh...

Poppy I'll put it in the ladies' loo. At least he won't go in there.

*Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms*

No?

**Belinda**                    You know what Dotty's like when she's like this.  
Freddie's trying now... *(She sees the whisky)* Oh, no!

**Poppy**                    He's hiding them round the stage now.

*Enter Frederick from the dressing-rooms*

No?

**Frederick**                No.

**Belinda**                    You didn't try for very long, my precious!

**Frederick**                No, well... *(He sees the whisky)* Oh dear.

**Belinda**                    He's hiding them on stage now.

*Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms, holding the whisky*

**Frederick**                No, Garry came rushing out of his dressing-room in a great state. I couldn't quite understand what he was saying. I often feel with Garry that I must have missed something somewhere. You know how stupid I am about that kind of thing. But I think he was saying he wanted to kill me.

**Belinda**                    Oh, my poor sweet!

**Frederick**                I thought I'd better leave him to it. I don't want to make

things worse. He's all right, is he?

**Belinda** Who, Garry? Anything but, by the sound of it!

**Frederick** I mean, he's going on?

**Tim** Garry? *Garry's* going on. Of course he's going on. What's all this about *Garry* not going on?

**Belinda** Yes, because if you have to go on for Garry, Poppy can't go on for Dotty, because if Poppy goes on for Dotty, you'll have to be on the book!

**Tim** This is getting farcical.

**Belinda** Money.

**Tim** Money?

**Belinda** You're waving money around.

**Tim** Oh, that's for... Oh...!

*Tim hurriedly grabs his raincoat from a peg and exits into the dressing-rooms*

**Frederick** She's a funny woman, you know - Dotty. So up and down. She was perfectly all right last night.

**Belinda** Last night?

**Frederick** Yes, she took me for a drink after the show in some club

she knows about.

**Belinda**                      She was with *you*? You were with *her*?

**Frederick**                    She was being very sympathetic about all my troubles.

**Belinda**                      She's not going to sink her teeth into you! I won't let her!

**Frederick**                    No, no, she couldn't have been nicer. In fact she came back to my digs afterwards for a cup of tea, and she told me all *her* troubles. Sat there until three o'clock this morning. I don't know *what* the landlady thought!

*Enter Poppy*

**Poppy**                        And another thing.

**Belinda**                      Nothing else, my sweet!

**Poppy**                        Where's Selsdon?

**Belinda**                      It turns out that it's Freddie here who's the cause of all the... Selsdon?

**Poppy**                        He's not in his dressing-room.

**Belinda**                      Oh - I might have guessed!

**Poppy**                        Oh - the front-of-house calls!

**Belinda**                      You do the calls. I'll took for Selsdon.

**Frederick**                      What shall I do?

**Belinda**                      *(firmly)* Absolutely nothing at all.

**Frederick**                      Right.

**Belinda**                      You've done quite enough already, my pet.

*Exit Belinda to the dressing-rooms*

**Poppy**                      *(into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in three minutes.

*Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms in his raincoat, carrying a large bunch of flowers*

**Tim**                              He wants to kill someone. *(He takes off his raincoat.)*

**Poppy**                      *Selsdon* wants to kill someone?

**Tim**                              Garry, Garry... *Selsdon*?

**Poppy**                      We've lost him.

**Tim**                              Oh, not again!

**Poppy**                      Flowers!

**Tim**                              *(embarrassed)* Oh... Well... They're just... You know...



**Poppy** *(taking them)* Oh, Tim that's really sweet of you!

Tim Oh... Well...

**Poppy** *(to Frederick)* Isn't that sweet of him?

**Frederick**                      Very charming.

*She kisses Tim*

**Poppy** I'll just look in the pub. *(She gives the flowers to Frederick)* Hold these.

*Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms*

**Tim** I'll take those. *(He takes the flowers)* Oh, the front of house calls! Hold these. *(He gives the flowers back to Frederick)*

**Frederick** Oh, I think Poppy's done them.

**Tim** She gave them two minutes, did she? I'll give them one minute. (*Into the microphone*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in one minute.

*He takes the flowers from Frederick*

**Frederick** Oh dear, I think she said three minutes.

**Tim** *Three minutes? I said three minutes! She said*

three minutes?

**Frederick** I think so.

**Tim** Hold these. *(He gives Frederick the flowers. Into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in two minutes.

*Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms, holding the bottle of whisky*

**Frederick** Any luck?

**Belinda** No, but I found yet another bottle.

**Frederick** Oh dear.

**Tim** Oh ...

**Belinda** Hidden in the ladies' lavatory, would you believe.

**Frederick** Oh my Lord!

**Tim** *(takes it)* Oxfam! I'll give it to Oxfam!

*Poppy runs in from the dressing-rooms.*

**Poppy** He's not in the pub...

**Belinda** *(indicates the whisky to Poppy)* No, he's hanging round ladies' lavatories!.

Tim I'd better get the spare gear on.

*Exit Tim to the dressing-rooms with the whisky*

Poppy *(into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in two minutes.

Frederick Oh dear - Tim's already told them two minutes.

Poppy He's done two minutes? *(Into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in one minute.

*Enter Lloyd through the pass door*

Lloyd What the fuck is going on?

Belinda Lloyd!

Frederick Great Scott!

Poppy I didn't know you were here!

Lloyd I'm not here! I'm at the Aberystwyth Festival! But I can't stand out there and listen to 'two minutes... three minutes... one minute... two minutes'!

Belinda My sweet, we're having great dramas in the dressing-rooms!

Lloyd We're having great dramas out there! *(To Poppy)* This is the matinee, honey! There's old-age pensioners out there! 'The curtain will rise in three minutes' -

we all start for the Gents. 'The curtain will rise in one minute' -  
we all come running out again. We don't know which way  
we're going!

**Poppy** Lloyd, I've got to have a talk to you.

**Lloyd** *(kissing her)* Of course, honey, of course.  
Looking forward to it.

**Poppy** You got my message?

**Lloyd** Many, many messages.

**Poppy** Why didn't you answer?

**Lloyd** I did! I have! I'm here!

**Poppy** Lloyd, there's something I've got to tell you.

**Lloyd** Go on, then.

**Poppy** Well... *(She hesitates, embarrassed because  
other people can hear, then tries to keep her voice down)* I  
went to the doctor today...

*Enter Brooke from the dressing-rooms, with the whisky*

**Belinda** Brooke!

*Lloyd hastily abandons Poppy.*

**Lloyd** *(to Poppy)* Later, later. All right?

*Brooke holds up the whisky.*

**Belinda** Oh, no! Not another one!

**Brooke** In my dressing-room!

**Belinda** *(She takes the whisky.)* In your *dressing-room?* *(To Lloyd)* It's getting completely out of control!

**Frederick** *(taking the whisky)* I'll give it to Oxfam, with the other one.

**Lloyd** *(holds out his hand for the whisky)* I'll do it.  
Thank you.

**Brooke** *(sees him)* Lloyd! *(Peers)* Lloyd?

**Lloyd** Got it in one. *(Kisses her.)*

**Brooke** You got my message?

**Lloyd** And came running, honey, and came running.

**Brooke** Lloyd, we've got to have a talk.

**Lloyd** We're *going* to have a talk, my love.

**Brooke** When?

**Lloyd** Later, yes? Later.

*He goes to take the whisky from Frederick, but is*

*distracted by seeing the flowers that Frederick is holding*

Flowers?

**Frederick** Oh, yes, sorry. *(He gives the flowers to Poppy)*

**Poppy** Tim bought them for me. *(She puts them on her desk in the prompt corner)*

**Lloyd** *Tim?* Bought them for *you?*

**Poppy** To cheer me up. *(Anxiously)* Lloyd...

**Lloyd** Nothing more, just for the moment. Thank you.  
*(To Frederick)* Strangle Tim for me when you see him, will you?

**Frederick** Right.

*Lloyd goes towards the pass door.*

**Belinda** But what about Dotty?

**Lloyd** I don't want to hear about Dotty.

**Frederick** And Garry?

**Lloyd** Not about Garry, either.

**Belinda** What about Selsdon?

**Lloyd** Listen, I think this show is beyond the help of a director. You just do it. I'll sit out there in the dark with a bag of toffees and enjoy it. OK? 'One minute' was the last call, if your memory goes back that far.

**Brooke** Lloyd!

**Poppy** Wait!

*Lloyd exits through the pass door. Poppy and Brooke jostle to follow him.*

**Brooke** *(to Poppy)* Excuse me!

**Poppy** I've got to talk to him!

**Frederick** *(separating them)* Girls, girls!

**Brooke** *(indicates the dressing-rooms)* I've a good mind to put my coat on and walk out of that door right here and now.

**Frederick** Listen, if you don't feel up to performing I'm sure Poppy would always be happy to have a bash on your behalf.

**Brooke** I *beg* your pardon?

**Poppy** Honestly!

**Belinda** *(firmly)* Brooke, you sit down and do your meditation. Poppy, you go and see what's happening with Dotty and Garry.

*Brooke reluctantly sits down on the floor. Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms.*

Freddie, my sweet precious ...

**Frederick** Did I say something wrong?

*Enter Selsdon hurriedly through the pass door*

**Selsdon** Where's Tim?

**Belinda** Selsdon! My sweet! Where have you been?

**Frederick** Are you all right?

*He puts out a sympathetic hand, then realizes that it contains the whisky bottle.*

Oh dear.

*He hurriedly puts it out of sight behind his back.*

**Belinda** We've been looking for you everywhere!

**Selsdon** Oh, yes, everywhere. In front - manager's office - bar.  
Not a sign of him.

**Belinda** He's looking for you in the dressing-rooms.

**Selsdon** That's right! Great shindig been going on down there. I thought Tim ought to know about it.

**Belinda** My love, I think he's heard.



**Selsdon** Oh, everything! Oh, he really went for her! 'I know when you've got your eye on someone!'

**Frederick** Oh dear, Dotty's got her eye on someone, has she?

**Selsdon** 'I've seen you creeping off into corners with that poor halfwit.'

**Frederick** Which poor halfwit?

**Belinda** Never mind, my love.

**Frederick** Not *Tim*?

**Belinda** No, no, no.

**Frederick** But who else is there? Apart from me?

*Enter Poppy from the dressing-rooms*

**Poppy** I think they're coming.

**Belinda** They're coming!

**Frederick** They're coming!

**Selsdon** I knew they wouldn't.

**Poppy** And you're *here*!

**Selsdon** Oh, yes, every word!

**Poppy** Right. *(Into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The performance is about to begin.

*Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms, in Burglar's costume.*

**Tim** They're coming.

**Belinda** And we've found Selsdon.

**Tim** *(to Selsdon)* How did *you* get here?

**Selsdon** How? Through the wall!

**Tim** *(into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats.

**Poppy** I've done it!

**Tim** *(into the microphone)* The performance is about to...

**Poppy** I've done it, I've done it!

**Tim** *(to Poppy)* Done it? Done 'about to begin'?

**Poppy** Yes! About to begin, about to begin!

**Tim** *(into the microphone)* ... is about to... is about to begin *at any moment*.

**Belinda** Poor Lloyd! He'll choke on his toffees.

**Selsdon** No, the walls are very thin, you see. 'I'm absolutely sick to death of it,' she cries... (*Takes in what Tim is wearing.*) Am I setting a bit of a trend?

**Tim** (*realises*) Oh...

**Belinda** (*quickly, snatching Tim's Burglar cap off*) Understudy rehearsal, my love.

**Selsdon** Oh, for Garry, yes - very timely. 'You try to give some poor devil a leg up,' she says.

*Enter Garry from the dressing-rooms*

**Belinda** Garry, my sweet!

**Selsdon** Or she may have said, 'a leg over...' Oh, and here he is.

**Frederick** (*to Garry*) Are you all right?

*Frederick collects the box and the flight bag from the props table, and smilingly offers them to Garry, who snatches them angrily*

**Selsdon** What does he say?

**Belinda** He's not saying anything, Selsdon, my sweet.

**Selsdon** Very sensible. Only stir it up again. 'I've seen you giving him little nods and smiles!' - that's what he kept saying.

*Enter Dotty from the dressing-rooms*

**Belinda** Dotty, my love!

**Selsdon** Oh, she's emerged, has she? Come on, old girl! You're on!

**Frederick** Are you all right?

**Selsdon** Is she all right?

*Dotty merely sighs and smiles and gives a little squeeze of the arm to Belinda. She takes up her place by the service quarters entrance, a tragically misunderstood woman. Garry moves pointedly away*

**Belinda** *(to Selsdon)* She's fine.

**Tim** All right, everyone?

**Selsdon** 'Little hugs and squeezes.'

**Belinda** Hush, love.

**Poppy** Curtain up?

*Everyone looks anxiously from Dotty to Garry and back again. Dotty and Garry both ignore the looks. They stand aloof, then both at the same moment turn to*

*check their appearance in the little mirrors fixed to the back of the set*

**Frederick** Look, Dotty... Look, Garry... I'm not going to make a great speech, but we *have* all got to go out there and put on a performance, and well...

**Belinda** We can't do it in silence, my loves! We're going to have to speak to each other!

*Pause. Neither Garry nor Dotty has apparently heard*

**Dotty** *(suddenly, bravely, to Tim)* What's the house like?

**Belinda** That's the spirit!

**Frederick** Well done, Dotty!

**Tim** It's quite good. Well, for a matinee.

**Poppy** There's quite a crowd at the front of the back stalls.

**Selsdon** *(to Poppy)* Come on, girl, get the tabs up! Some of those OAPs out there haven't got long to go.

**Poppy** Right. Quiet, then, please...

**Frederick** Let me just say one more word... Hold it a moment, Poppy...

**Selsdon** Let *me* just say one word. Sardines!

**Belinda**                      **Sardines!**

**Frederick**                      Sardines!

*Belinda rushes to the prop table to fetch Dotty the plate of sardines that she takes on for her first entrance*

**Poppy** (over tannoy) Standing by, please. Music cue one...

*Enter Lloyd through the pass door*

Lloyd *Now what?*

**Tim** We're just going up.

**Lloyd** We've been sitting there for an hour! They've gone quiet! They think someone's died!

**Frederick** I'm sorry, Lloyd. It's my fault. I was just saying a few words to everyone.

**Lloyd** Freddie, have you ever thought of having a brain transplant?

**Frederick** Sorry, sorry. Wrong moment. I see that.

**Lloyd** Anybody else have thoughts they feel they must communicate?

**Poppy** Well, not now, of course, but ...

Lloyd *What?*

Poppy I mean, you know, later...

**Lloyd** *(to Tim, quietly, conscious that Brooke has stopped meditating and started watching)* And you bought these flowers for Poppy?

Tim                                No... (*Conscious that Poppy is watching*) Well...  
yes...

**Lloyd** And you didn't buy any flowers for *me*?

Tim No... well... no...

**Lloyd** Tim, have you ever heard of such a thing as jealous rage?

Tim Yes... well... yes...

**Lloyd** Then take ten pounds of your own money, Tim,  
and go out to the florists and buy some flowers for *me!*

Tim Lloyd, we're just going up! I've got to run the show!

**Lloyd**                         Never mind the show. Concentrate on the floral arrangements. Bought them for Poppy! You two could have Freddie's old brain. You could have half each.

*Exit Lloyd through the pass door. Poppy sobs.*

Frederick

Oh dear.

Belinda

Don't cry, Poppy, love

Selsdon

Just get the old bus on the road.

Poppy

*(over tannoy, tearfully)* Standing by, please. Elecs stand by.

Garry

*(to himself)* Christ! *(He hammers his fist against the back of the set in frustration.)*

Poppy

Quiet backstage!

*She waits for Garry to subside, then gives an involuntary noisy sob herself.*

Belinda

Hush, love.

Poppy

*(over tannoy, tearfully)* Music cue one go.

*The introductory music for Nothing On.*

Tab's going up...

*[Note: the act that follows is a somewhat condensed version of the one we saw rehearsed.]*

*As the curtain rises the telephone is ringing.*

*Dotty makes her entrance*

*----- Enter from the service quarters*



-----

*Mrs Clackett, carrying a plate of sardines*

**Mrs Clackett** It's no good you going on...

*There is a sound of scattered applause.----*

*----- She pauses a beat to acknowledge the applause.*

I can't open sardines and answer the phone. I've only got one pair of feet.

*A small laugh. -----*

*----- Puts the sardines down on the telephone table by the sofa, and picks up the phone*

*Selsdon, Belinda and Frederick express silent relief that the show has at last started, so all their problems are over. They subside on to the backstage chairs.*

Hello... Yes, but there's no one here, love... No, Mr Brent's not here... He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain... Mr Philip Brent, that's right... The one who writes the plays, that's him, only now he writes them in Spain... No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here... Am I in Spain? No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with, because it's the royal what's it called on the telly - the royal you know - where's the paper, then...

*Tim puts his raincoat on, takes out his wallet, checks his money, and exits to the dressing-rooms.*

*Belinda points out to the others that Garry is banging his head softly against the set again.*

*Frederick puts the whisky down on his chair and goes across to Garry.*

*Belinda watches apprehensively as Frederick gives Garry's arm a silently*

*sympathetic squeeze, and smilingly puts his fingers to his lips to remind him to be quiet. Garry shakes him off indignantly.*

*Belinda hurries across to draw Fredrick off.*

*Frederick cannot understand what he has done to cause offence. He demonstrates what he did by giving Garry's arm another friendly squeeze.*

*Garry drops his props and threatens to hit Frederick.*

*Frederick takes shelter behind Brooke, who is now waiting for her entrance. Garry chases him round and round her.*

*Frederick hurriedly puts his handkerchief to his nose.*

*Belinda urges Garry to the front door for his entrance. -----*

*She searches in the newspaper*

... And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house-agents, because they're the agents for the house... Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one... ? No, they're not in Spain, they're next to the phone in the study. Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, I'll go and look.

*She replaces the receiver*

Always the same, isn't it. Soon as you take the weight off your feet, down it all comes on your head.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper*

*The sound of a key in the lock*

----- *The front door opens. On the doorstep stands Roger, holding a cardboard box.*

**Roger** ... I have a housekeeper, yes,  
but this is her afternoon off.

*Brooke makes her entrance*  
-----

----- *Enter Vicki through the front door.*

*Frederick looks in his handkerchief,  
and comes over faint. Dotty has to  
put her arm round him to help him to a  
chair.*

So we've got the place entirely to  
ourselves.

*As Garry turns back to collect*  
-----

----- *Roger goes back and brings in a  
flight bag, and closes the front door*

*the flight bag he gets a fleeting  
glimpse of this.*

*I'll just check. As Garry comes through  
the service quarters he takes another  
look. -----*

----- *He opens the door to the service  
quarters. Vicki gazes round*

Hello? Anyone at home?

*He stamps on Frederick's foot and re-  
enters -----*

----- *Closes the door*

No, there's no one here. So what do  
you think?

*Frederick struggles with damaged foot  
and bleeding nose. Dotty gets down  
on her knees to examine the foot.*

**Vicki** All these doors!

**Roger** Oh, only a handful, really.

*Garry keeps appearing at the various doors, trying to see what Dotty and Frederick are up to.*

-----

*Belinda makes things worse by trying to move Dotty's head to a less suggestive position.*

*Garry comes off*

-----

*and rushes at Frederick and Dotty. Belinda pushes him back on stage.*

*Belinda just manages to detach Dotty from her ministrations and get her back on stage for her entrance.-----*

*----- He opens the various doors one after another to demonstrate.*

Study... Kitchen... And a self-contained service flat for the housekeeper.

**Vicki** Terrific. And which one's the ... ?

**Roger** What?

**Vicki** You know ...

**Roger** The usual offices? Through here.

*----- He opens the downstairs bathroom door for her*

**Vicki** Fantastic.

*Exit Vicki into the bathroom*

*----- Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, without the newspaper*

**Mrs Clackett** Now I've lost the sardines...

*Belinda tries to explain to Frederick that Dotty has taken a fancy to him. Frederick can't understand a word of it.*

*Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom, and slips the champagne back into the bag*

**Roger** I'm sorry. I thought there was no one here.

**Mrs Clackett** I'm not here. I'm off, only it's the royal you know, where they wear those hats, and they're all covered in fruit, and who are you?

*Belinda has to break off to remind Brooke to...*

**Roger** I'm from the agents. I just dropped in to... go into a few things.

*... push the bathroom door open.-----*

*----- The bathroom door opens.*

Well, to check some of the measurements...

*Roger closes it*

*And again -----*

*----- The bathroom door opens.*

Do one or two odd jobs...

*Roger closes it*

*Belinda suddenly points out that*

Oh, and a client. I'm showing a

*Selsdon has discovered the whisky  
that Frederick left on the chair.*

*Selsdon opens the bottle, smells it,  
closes it again, and then goes off to  
the dressing-rooms with it.*

*Frederick goes to run after Selsdon.  
Belinda silently urges him to wait there  
- sit still - do absolutely nothing - while  
she runs after Selsdon.*

*Exit Belinda in the direction of the  
dressing-rooms in pursuit of Selsdon.*

*Dotty makes her exit*

-----

*puts down the sardines, shaking her  
head with misery, and begins to weep.*

*Frederick is very agitated by this. He*

prospective tenant over the house.

*The bathroom door opens.*

**Vicki** What's wrong with this door?

*Roger closes it.*

**Roger** She's thinking of renting it. Her  
interest is definitely aroused.

*Enter Vicki from bathroom*

**Vicki** That's not the bedroom.

**Roger** The bedroom? No, that's the  
downstairs bathroom and WC suite.  
And this is the housekeeper, Mrs  
Crockett.

**Mrs Clackett** Clackett, dear, Clackett.  
Only now I've lost the newspaper.

----- *Exit Mrs Clackett into the study,  
carrying the sardines*

**Roger** I'm sorry about this.

**Vicki** That's all right. We don't want  
the television, do we?

**Roger** Only she's been in the family  
for generations.

*takes the sardines away from Dotty, pats her on the shoulder, gives her a handkerchief, realises that it's not in a state to be seen, puts it hurriedly away, pushes the sardines back into her hand, and edges her towards the door.*

*At the last moment Dotty realises she hasn't got the newspaper.*

*Frederick runs and fetches it from the props table. Dotty realises that she is still holding the sardines, and hurls them to Frederick just in time...*

*... to make her entrance. -----*

**Vicki** Great. Come on, then. *(She starts upstairs)* I've got to be in Basingstoke by four.

**Roger** Perhaps we should just have a glass of champagne.

**Vicki** We'll take it up with us.

**Roger** Yes. Well ...

**Vicki** And don't let my files out of sight.

**Roger** No. Only ...

**Vicki** What?

**Roger** Well ...

**Vicki** Her?

**Roger** She *has* been in the family for generations.

*----- Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, with the newspaper but without the sardines*

*Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms leading a bewildered Selsdon, but without the whisky.*

*Frederick tells her what a terrible state Dotty is in.*

*They turn to watch her anxiously as she makes her exit.*  
-----

*Selsdon seizes the opportunity to depart again to the dressing-rooms.*

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines ... Sardines ...  
It's not for me to say, of course, dear,  
only I will just say this: don't think twice  
about it - take the plunge. You'll really  
enjoy it here.

**Vicki** Oh. Great.

**Mrs Clackett** *(to Vicki)* And we'll enjoy  
having you. *(To Roger)* Won't we,  
love?

**Roger** Oh. Well.

**Vicki** Terrific.

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines, sardines.  
Can't put your feet up on an empty  
stomach, can you.

----- *Exit Mrs Clackett to service  
quarters*

**Vicki** You see? She thinks it's great.  
She's even making us sardines!

**Roger** Well...

**Vicki** I think she's terrific.

**Roger** Terrific.



*Belinda runs after Selsdon. Frederick goes to run after her, but turns anxiously back to reassure Dotty.*

*But Dotty is now smiling bravely, and telling Frederick that she has pulled herself together, thanks to him.*

*Dotty gives Frederick a kiss to express her gratitude.*

*As Garry comes through the door  
-----  
of the mezzanine bathroom he catches a fleeting glimpse of the kiss.*

*Frederick takes the cardboard box and goes to make his entrance, then turns back to pick up the flight bag and looks round for Belinda to give it to. No Belinda. He urgently shows Dotty the flight bag and explains the situation to her.*

**Vicki** So which way?

**Roger** *(picking up the bags)* All right. Before she comes back with the sardines.

**Vicki** Up here?

**Roger** Yes, yes.

**Vicki** In here?

**Roger** Yes, yes, yes.

*----- Exeunt Roger and Vicki into mezzanine bathroom*

**Vicki** *(off)* It's another bathroom.

*They reappear*

**Roger** No, no, no.

**Vicki** Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

**Roger** I mean in *here*.

*He nods at the next door - the first along the gallery. Vicki leads the way in.*

*Garry appears in the linen cupboard doorway.*

*-----He takes a good look at the earnest colloquy between Frederick and Dotty.*

*Garry takes the sheet from Vicki*

*-----*

*Garry hurls the sheet at Frederick and Dotty. -----  
He goes back on stage.*

*Dotty starts to run off to get Belinda, but has to run back to help Frederick.*

*Belinda runs in from the dressing-room, holding the bottle of whisky.*

*She grabs the flight bag, just manages to give the whisky to Dotty, and...*

*----- Roger follows*

**Vicki** Oh, black sheets!

*----- She produces one.*

**Roger** It's the airing cupboard

*----- This one, this one.*

*He drops the bag and box and struggles nervously to open the second door along the gallery, the bedroom*

**Vicki** Oh, you're in a real state! You can't even get the door open.

*Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the bedroom*

*The sound of a key in the lock, and the front door opens. On the doorstep stands Philip, carrying a cardboard box.*

**Philip** ... No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.

*... make her entrance.*

-----

*Enter Selsdon from the dressing-rooms.*

*He asks Dotty for the whisky.*

*But Dotty is distracted by Garry, who silently but forcefully explains to her that he will no longer tolerate these furtive meetings with Frederick.*

*Selsdon tries urgently to get the whisky off Garry and Dotty as they quarrel.*

*Garry and Dotty both turn on him in fury.*

*Garry pleads with Dotty - kneels - weeps - hangs on to her plate of sardines.*

*----- Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Garry's.*

**Flavia** Home!

**Philip** Home, sweet home!

**Flavia** Dear old house!

**Philip** Just waiting for us to come back!

**Flavia** It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!

*Philip picks up the bag and box and ushers Flavia towards the stairs.*

**Philip**

There is something to be said for being a tax exile.

**Flavia**

Leave those!

*He drops the bag and box and kisses her. She flees upstairs, laughing, and he after her*

**Philip** Sh!

**Flavia** What?

**Philip** Inland Revenue may hear us!

*Dotty breaks away from Garry and goes to make her entrance. Selsdon points out that she is still holding the whisky.*

*They creep to the bedroom door*

*Garry takes it off her as she makes her entrance.*

*----- Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters carrying a fresh plate of sardines*

**Mrs Clackett** *(to herself)* What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

*Selsdon tries to get the whisky off Garry, but Garry turns to ascend the platform for his entrance.*

*She puts the sardines on the telephone table and sits on the sofa*

**Philip and Flavia** *(looking down from the gallery)* Mrs Clackett!

*Garry looks around for something to do with the whisky, and gives it to Brooke.*

*Mrs Clackett jumps up*

*Brookes peers at it, no idea what she's supposed to do with it.*

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of my boots!

**Philip** So did mine!

*She puts it down on the steps, right in*

**Flavia** We thought you'd gone!

*front of Selsdon, in order to undress for her entrance. While her back is turned Selsdon snatches it up and conceals it.*

*Selsdon demonstrates to Brooke pulling a chain. Brooke peers uncomprehendingly.*

*Exit Selsdon to the dressing-rooms with the whisky.*

*Belinda makes her exit.*  
-----

*Belinda looks urgently round for Selsdon, then makes drinking gestures interrogatively to Brooke. Brooke points towards the dressing-*

**Mrs Clackett** I thought you was in Spain!

**Philip** We are! We are!

**Flavia** You haven't seen us!

**Philip** We're not here!

**Mrs Clackett** You'll want your things, look. *(She indicates the bag and box)*

**Philip** Oh. Yes. Thanks.

*He comes downstairs, and picks up the bag and box*

**Mrs Clackett** *(to Flavia)* Oh, and that bed hasn't been aired, love.

**Flavia** I'll get a hot water bottle.

----- *Exit Flavia into the mezzanine bathroom*

**Mrs Clackett** I've put all your letters in the study, dear.

**Philip** Oh good heavens. Where are they?

*rooms and repeats Selsdon's  
incomprehensible gesture of pulling a  
chain. Exit Belinda towards the  
dressing-room.*

*Garry, still on the platform, tries to see  
what Dotty and Frederick are doing,  
but is fetched back by Brooke...*

*Exeunt Mrs Clackett and Philip into  
the study. Philip is still holding the  
bag and box... for his entrance.*

-----

*Belinda enters urgently and signals  
the information that Selsdon is  
drinking in the lavatory.*

*Frederick runs to the dressing-rooms  
exit to deal with this, but is brought  
back by Belinda and forced to sit  
down.*

**Mrs Clackett**

I've put them all in the pigeonhouse.

**Philip** In the pigeonhouse?

**Mrs Clackett** In the little pigeonhouse  
in your desk, love.

*----- Enter Roger from the bedroom,  
still dressed, tying his tie*

**Roger** Yes, but I could hear voices!

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her  
underwear*

**Vicki** Voices? What sort of voices?

**Roger** People's voices.

**Vicki** *(looks over the bannisters)* Oh,  
look, she's opened our sardines.

*She moves to go downstairs. Roger  
grabs her*

**Roger** Come back!

*Dotty and Belinda run towards the dressing-rooms instead, but Dotty immediately has to run back to the study door to go on. Belinda runs back to the props table for the sardines, gives them to Dotty, just in time for her...*

*... to make her entrance.*

-----

*Brooke makes her exit-----*

*Belinda tries to demonstrate to Brooke that she is going to look for Selsdon, then runs back to remind her...*

**Vicki** What?

**Roger** I'll fetch them! You can't go downstairs like that.

**Vicki** Why not?

**Roger** Mrs Crackett.

**Vicki** Mrs Crackett?

**Roger** One has certain obligations.

*----- Enter Mrs Clackett from the study. She is carrying the first plate of sardines*

**Mrs Clackett**

*(to herself)* Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like a Sunday school outing.

*----- Roger pushes Vicki through the first available door, which happens to be the linen cupboard*

Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

**Roger** Yes, still poking... well, still around.

**Mrs Clackett** In the airing cupboard,

were you?

**Roger** No no.

*... to open the linen cupboard door.*

-----

*----- The linen cupboard door begins to open. He slams it shut.*

Well, just checking the sheets and pillow-cases. Going through the inventory.

*Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms with a second, smaller, bunch of flowers. He takes his raincoat off.*

*He starts downstairs*

Mrs Blackett...

*Belinda gestures hastily to Tim in passing to explain the situation, and exits to the dressing-rooms.*

**Mrs Clackett** Clackett, dear, Clackett.

*She puts down the sardines beside the other sardines*

*Tim asks Frederick where she is going.*

**Roger** Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house, Mrs Clackett?

*Frederick demonstrates raising the elbow.*

**Mrs Clackett** I haven't seen no one, dear.

*Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms. She demonstrates that Selsdon has locked himself in somewhere.*

**Roger** I thought I heard voices.

**Mrs Clackett** Voices? There's no voices here, love.

**Roger** I must have imagined it.



*Philip breaks off from the conversation  
to say*

-----

*Tim hands Belinda the flowers, and  
dashes out to the dressing-rooms.*

*Belinda gives the flowers to Frederick  
and fetches the fireman's axe from the  
fire-point. She demonstrates using it  
to break a door down.*

*Belinda is going to rush off to the  
dressing-rooms with the axe when  
Poppy reminds her that she has an  
entrance coming up. Belinda runs up  
on to the platform, finds that she is still  
holding the axe, and gives it to  
Brooke.*

*But before Belinda can explain what to  
do with the axe, she has to make her  
entrance.*

-----

*Garry advances threateningly upon  
Frederick and points suspiciously at  
the flowers he is holding.*

----- **Philip** *(off)* Oh good Lord above!

*Roger, with his back to her, picks up  
both plates of sardines*

**Roger** I beg your pardon?

**Mrs Clackett** Oh good Lord above,  
the study door's open.

*She crosses and closes it. Roger  
looks out of the window*

**Roger** There's another car outside!  
That's not Mr Hackham's, is it? Or Mr  
Dudley's?

*Exit Roger through the front door,  
holding both plates of sardines*

----- *Enter Flavia from the mezzanine  
bathroom, carrying a hot water bottle.  
She sees the linen cupboard door  
swinging open as she passes, pushes  
it shut, and turns the key*

**Flavia** Nothing but flapping doors in  
this house.

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom*

*Frederick has to hand Garry the flowers in order to make his entrance.-----*

*Brooke comes down from the platform and asks Garry what she is supposed to do with the axe. Garry takes it thoughtfully and puts the flowers into her hands. Belinda, coming down from the platform to go off after Selsdon, stops at the sight of Garry with the axe, as he looks at it and feels the edge. He looks at the door through which Frederick will exit. Belinda looks at the door likewise. Garry looks back at the axe. Belinda looks back at the axe. Garry begins to smile an evil smile. Horrified, Belinda quickly takes the flowers from Brooke and sends her off in her place to find Selsdon, then tries to get the axe away from Garry. Garry holds it behind his back. Belinda, still holding the flowers, puts her arms round Garry, trying to reach the axe.*

*Dotty appears*  
-----

*just in time to see Belinda with her*

*----- Enter from the study Philip, holding a tax demand and its envelope*

**Philip** ' ... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint... proceedings in court...'

**Mrs Clackett** Oh yes, and that reminds me, a gentleman come about the house.

**Philip** Don't tell me. I'm not here.

**Mrs Clackett** So I'll just sit down and turn on the... sardines, I've forgotten the sardines! I don't know - if it wasn't fixed to my shoulders I'd forget what day it was.

*----- Exit Mrs Clackett to the service quarters*

*arms round Garry.*

*Poppy urges Belinda upstairs for her entrance. Belinda flees up to the platform and opens the door to make her entrance.*  
-----

*She makes one desperate effort to grab the dress from the backstage hook where it is hanging, then gives up, and enters still carrying the flowers instead. -----*

*Belinda, on stage, has to vary the line.*  
----

*Dotty launches herself upon Garry. He produces the axe in explanation of his behaviour. Dotty snatches it from him, and raises it to hit him.*

**Philip** I didn't get this! I'm not here.  
I'm in Spain. But if I didn't get it I didn't open it.

----- *Enter Flavia from the bedroom.*

----- *She is holding flowers instead of the dress that Vicki arrived in.*

**Flavia** Darling, I never had a dress...

----- ... or rather a bunch of flowers like this, did I?

**Philip** (*abstracted*) Didn't you?

**Flavia** I shouldn't buy anything as tarty as this... Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

**Philip** I should never have touched it.

**Flavia** No, it's lovely.

**Philip** Stick it down. Put it back.  
Never saw it.

*Frederick appears*

-----

*and snatches the axe from Dotty, in the nick of time. He innocently gives it to Garry, who raises it to hit Frederick. Dotty snatches it from Garry, and raises it once again to hit him.*

*Belinda appears*

-----

*and snatches the axe from Dotty...*

*... as Garry makes his entrance.*

-----

*Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms. He grabs the axe from Belinda and returns to the dressing-rooms.*

*Belinda is going to follow him, but then realizes that there is...*

*... no knocking*

-----

*because Brooke is still off.*

*Garry on stage repeats the line.*

-----

*----- Exit Philip into study*

**Flavia** Well, I'll put it in the attic, with all the other things you gave me that are too precious to wear.

*----- Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor*

*----- Enter Roger through the front door, still carrying both plates of sardines*

**Roger** All right, all right... Now the study door's open again! What's going on?

*He puts the sardines down - one plate on the telephone table, where it was before, one near the front door - and goes towards the study...*

*----- Knocking!*

*----- Knocking...! Knocking...? Upstairs!*

*He runs upstairs.*

*Belinda realises what's wrong, and  
knocks on the set with a prop.*

-----

*Brooke doesn't make her  
entrance-----  
because she is still off in the dressing  
rooms.  
Garry comes through the linen  
cupboard door to look for Brooke.*

*He improvises.*

-----

*Belinda tells Poppy to read in  
Brooke's part from the book.*

*Belinda hands the flowers to Frederick  
and runs off to the dressing-rooms,  
still holding the axe.*

**Poppy** (*reading*) Of course it's me!  
You put me in here! In the dark! With  
all black sheets and things!

-----

**Vicki** Why did I lock the door? Why

----- *Knocking.*

Oh my God, there's something in the  
airing cupboard!

*He unlocks it and opens it.*

----- *Looks for Vicki*

Oh, it's you.

----- Is it you...? I mean, you know,  
hidden under all the sheet and towels  
in here... I can't just stand here and,  
you know, indefinitely...

-----

**Roger** But, darling, why did you lock  
the door?

did *you* lock the door!

-----

*Enter Lloyd like a whirlwind through the pass door. He demands silently to know what's going on. Frederick tries to explain, while Poppy and Garry continue to play the scene.*

**Roger** I didn't lock the door!**Vicki**  
*Someone* locked the door!-----

*Frederick hands Lloyd the flowers to make ready for his entrance.*

**Vicki** Like what? -----

**Vicki** OK, I'll take it off. -----

*Lloyd shoves the flowers into Dotty's hands to get rid of them, and indicates to the terrified Poppy that she is to go on for Brooke.*

*Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms with Brooke, just in time for her to see Lloyd tearing Poppy's skirt off.*

*Garry stands half on and half off, waiting for Brooke. -----  
At the sight of Brooke, Lloyd abandons Poppy, and instead urges Brooke upstairs*

-----

**Roger** Anyway, we can't stand here like this.

-----

**Roger** In your underwear.

-----

**Roger** In here, in here!

*Exit Roger into the bedroom.*

*Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope, and a tube of glue*

**Philip** Darling, this glue. Is it the sort that you can never get unstuck ... ? Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.

*Exit Philip into the study with the tax demand, envelope, glue and one of the plates of sardines from the telephone table*

----- *Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the hot water bottle. He looks up and down the landing*

*for the next scene, for which she is now late.*

*Garry improvises. -----*

*Brooke makes her entrance through the linen cupboard door...*

*... and starts to play the previous scene that she missed. -----*

*Lloyd despairs at Brooke's inflexibility. Dotty asks Lloyd if the flowers are really for her. He pushes them back to her absently. Dotty is very touched. She gives Lloyd a grateful kiss...*

*... just as Garry appears to see it.*

*-----*

*Garry moves closer to see, and cuts three pages of script.*

*-----*

*He panics, and stands for a moment unable to think where he is or what he is doing, then enters through the airing-cupboard instead of the bedroom.*

*Everyone backstage panics as well: 'Where are we?'*

**Roger** A hot water bottle! I didn't put it there!

----- I didn't put this hot water bottle. I mean, you know, I'm standing out here, with the hot water bottle in my hands...

----- **Vicki** Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark! With all black sheets and things!

**Roger** Someone in the bathroom, filling hot water bottles... What?

----- *Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom*

**Vicki** Why did /lock the door? Why did *you* lock the door!

----- **Roger (off)** Don't panic! Don't panic!

*Enter Roger, and goes downstairs.*

There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this. I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening. You wait here... You can't stand here looking like that ... Wait in the study... Study, study, study!

*Poppy desperately turns over the pages of the book to find the new place, while everyone looks over her shoulder.*

*Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms, leading Selsdon, who is holding his trousers up. Tim is holding the whisky, and the axe embedded in a shattered section of the door of the Gents. He hands the whisky to Frederick.*

*Frederick roars ----- and goes to make his entrance, then realises that he is holding the whisky instead of his props.*

*Frederick gives a cry of alarm, claps his hand over his mouth, then realises he was suppose to give a cry anyway, drops the whisky under the chairs, grabs his props, and...*

*... makes his entrance.*

-----

*Tim gives the axe to Lloyd and snatches the flowers from Dotty, who snatches them right back, leaving Tim*

*Exit Roger into the service quarters*

*Vicki opens the study door.*

*----- There's a roar of exasperation from Philip, off. She turns and flees*

**Vicki** Roger! There's a strange figure in there! Where are you?

*There is another cry from Philip, off*

*Exit Vicki blindly through the front door*

*----- Enter Philip from the study. He is holding the tax demand in his right hand, and one of the plates of sardines in his left*

**Philip** Darling, I know this is going to



*with only one. He hands this to Lloyd, who hands it to Brooke. She peers at it as it keels sadly over, then hurls it on to the floor and runs out to the dressing-rooms.*

*Lloyd gives more money to Tim, who puts his raincoat on and exits wearily to the dressing-rooms.*

*Selsdon explains to everyone where he innocently was by a show of pulling a chain. The demonstration causes his trousers to fall down.*

*Selsdon stoops to retrieve his fallen trousers, and sees the whisky that Frederick concealed beneath the chairs. He picks it up, and Lloyd snatches it out of his hand.*

sound silly, but ...

*He struggles to get the tax demand unstuck from his fingers, encumbered by the plate of sardines*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac*

**Flavia** Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic.

**Philip** I can't come to bed! I'm glued to a tax demand!

**Flavia** Darling, why don't you put the sardines down?

*Philip puts the plate of sardines down on the table. But when he takes his hand away the sardines come with it*

**Philip** Darling, I'm stuck to the sardines!

**Flavia** Darling, don't play the fool. Get that bottle marked poison in the downstairs loo. That eats through anything.

*Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor*

**Philip** (*flapping the tax demand*) I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

*Frederick exits*

-----

*and sees that Selsdon is otherwise occupied.*

*Frederick repeats the cue*

-----

*and slams the door again.*

*They all suddenly realise that this is Selsdon's cue. They rush him to the window. He raises his arms to open the window and his trousers fall down.*

*They bundle him on as best they can.*

-----

*They watch him. Then Garry snatches the flowers from Dotty, and hurls them on the floor. Frederick reproachfully picks them up, and hands them back to Dotty.*

*Garry grabs the axe from Lloyd and advances upon Frederick. Dotty hands the flowers to Belinda so as to be able to throw her arms protectively round Frederick. Belinda dumps the flowers on Poppy's desk so as to be able to snatch Frederick away from Dotty. Dotty snatches him back. They snatch him back and forth, like two dogs with a bone, then*

*----- Exit Philip into the downstairs bathroom.*

*----- Philip* But this is ridiculous.

*Exit Philip into the downstairs bathroom*

*----- The window opens, and through it appears an elderly Burglar.*

**Burglar** No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in*

No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I

*push him aside and face up to each other.  
Dotty grabs the axe from Garry to use on  
Belinda. But they are distracted because...*

doing now? I'm breaking into paper  
bags! So what are they offering? *(He  
peers at the television)* One  
microwave oven.

*He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa*

What? Fifty quid? Hardly worth lifting  
it.

*He inspects the paintings and  
ornaments*

Junk ... Junk ... if you insist...

*He pockets some small item*

Where's his desk? No, they all say the  
same thing...

*Selsdon appears at the front door.*

-----

*----- He opens the front door to get a prompt.*

**Selsdon** Yes? Yes? 'They all say the same thing...?'

**Poppy** 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

**Selsdon** Hard to what?

**Omnes** (*shouting*) 'Adjust to retirement!'

*Selsdon goes back on.*-----

*----- It's hard to assess a requirement..*

*Selsdon makes his exit.*

-----

*----- Exit Burglar into the study.*

*Dotty is about to resume her attack upon Belinda when she realises that Garry is already making his entrance.*

-----

*----- Enter Roger from the service quarters..***Roger** ... And the prospective tenant naturally wishes to know if there is any previous history of paranormal phenomena.

*Dotty hands the axe panic-stricken to Belinda and makes her own entrance.*-----

*----- Enter Mrs Clackett, holding another plate of sardines*

*Brooke enters from the dressing rooms, wearing a leopard-skin overcoat and stuffing possessions into an overnight bag.*

*She picks up her single flower from the floor, hurls it down again in front of Lloyd, and storms out to the dressing-rooms.*

*Lloyd subsides despairingly into a chair.*

*Frederick indicates that he will go after Brooke. Belinda insists that she will do it. She runs towards the dressing-rooms with the axe, sees Lloyd taking a despairing swig of whisky, and runs back to take the bottle away from him.*

*Frederick smooths his hair and buttons his jacket, and exits with determination towards the dressing-rooms.*

*Belinda looks to see how much Lloyd has drunk, puts it out of his reach, runs towards the dressing rooms, realises Selsdon has picked up the whisky, and runs back.*

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, yes, dear, it's all nice and paranormal.

**Roger** I mean, has anything ever dematerialized before? Has anything ever

*He sees the television set on the sofa.*

... flown about?

*Mrs Clackett puts the sardines down on the telephone table, moves the television set back, and closes the front door*

**Mrs Clackett** Flown about? No, the things move themselves on their own two feet, just like they do in any house.

**Roger** I'd better warn the prospective tenant. She is inspecting the study.

*He opens the study door and then closes it again*

There's a man in there!

**Mrs Clackett** No, no, there's no one in the house, love.

*Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms with a third, very small bunch of flowers. He gives them to Lloyd, but Belinda shows Lloyd Selsdon concealing the whisky about his person, and Lloyd goes to deal with him, then comes back to give Belinda the flowers so as to leave his hands free. Selsdon quickly conceals the whisky in the fire-bucket.*

**Roger** (*opening the study door*) Look!  
Look! *Lloyd searches Selsdon*

-----  
*Selsdon demonstrates that his hands  
are empty.*

*Belinda hands the axe to Tim and  
gives Lloyd a grateful kiss for the  
flowers.*

*Enter Frederick triumphantly from the  
dressing-rooms, bringing a reluctant  
Brooke back, still in her overcoat and  
carrying the holdall.*

*She reluctantly starts to take the  
overcoat off, then peers at the  
spectacle of Belinda, with flowers,  
kissing Lloyd.*

*Tim, seeing this as he takes his  
raincoat off, puts the raincoat back on  
again, hands the axe to Lloyd, and  
wearily holds out his hand for money.*

*Lloyd wearily hands the axe to  
Frederick and gives Tim his last small  
change.*

*Exit Tim to the dressing-rooms.  
Belinda suddenly realises that her*

----- He's... *searching for something.*

**Mrs Clackett** (*glancing briefly*) I can't  
see no one.

**Roger** You can't see him? But this is  
extraordinary! And where is my  
prospective tenant? I left her in there!  
She's gone! My prospective tenant  
has disappeared!

*He closes the study door, and looks  
round the living-room. He sees the  
sardines on the telephone table*

Oh my God.

**Mrs Clackett** Now what?

**Roger** There!

**Mrs Clackett** Where?

**Roger** The sardines!

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, the sardines.

**Roger** You can see the sardines.

**Mrs Clackett** I can see the sardines.

*Roger touches them cautiously, then*

*flowers are attracting jealous attention, and puts them on Poppy's table with the other flowers.*

*Brooke is amazed and even more upset to see that the flowers are in fact for Poppy. She puts her overcoat back on and turns to walk out again.*

*Lloyd stops her, and looks desperately round for some other token of his affection to give her instead of the flowers.*

*Frederick, tidily putting the axe back on the firepoint, finds the whisky in the fire-bucket and holds it aloft - another bottle!*

*Selsdon takes the bottle from Frederick, but Lloyd takes it from Selsdon in time for...*

*... Selsdon to make his entrance.*  
-----

*Lloyd gives the whisky to Brooke, kisses her, and tries to persuade her out of her overcoat while she peers at the bottle.*

*picks up the plate*

I can see the way they're going, too.

**Roger** I'm not letting these sardines out of my hand. But where is my prospective tenant?

*He goes upstairs, holding the sardines*

**Mrs Clackett** I'm going to be opening sardines all night, in and out of here like a cuckoo on a clock.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the service quarters*

**Roger** Vicki! Vicki!

*Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom*

----- *Enter Burglar from the study, carrying an armful of silver cups, etc.*

**Burglar** No, I miss the violence. I miss having other human beings around to terrify.



*Frederick takes the whisky out of  
Brooke's hands.*

*Lloyd takes it back and hands it to  
Brooke. Frederick takes it away again  
to show it to Dotty, turning her round  
to show her that it came from the fire-  
bucket, just as....*

*... Garry makes his exit and sees  
Dotty now apparently being hugged  
by Frederick*

-----

*Garry leans down from the platform  
and tips the plate of sardines he is  
carrying over Dotty's head. Everyone,  
even Brooke, half in and half out of  
her coat, watches, hands helplessly  
upraised.*

*Garry makes his entrance.*

-----

*Dotty puts the whisky down on the  
steps to deal with the sardines on her  
head.*

*He dumps the silverware on the sofa,  
and exits into the study*

*Enter Roger from mezzanine  
bathroom*

**Roger** Where's she gone? Vicki?

----- *Exit Roger into the linen cupboard*

*Enter Burglar from the study, carrying  
Philip's box and bag. He empties the  
contents of the box out behind the  
sofa, and loads the silverware into the  
box*

**Burglar** It's nice to hear a bit of  
shouting and screaming around you.  
All this silence gets you down.

----- *Enter Roger from the linen  
cupboard, still holding the sardines*

**Roger** (calls) Vicki! Vicki!

*Garry makes his exit*

-----

*then picks up the whisky and takes a swig, very pleased with himself.*

*While Garry stands on the platform with his head back, Dotty climbs on a chair and ties his shoelaces together.*

*Everyone, even Brooke, watches, horrified.*

*Lloyd tries to warn Garry. Garry brushes him aside because he has an entrance coming up.*

*Garry puts the whisky down and...*

*... makes his entrance*

-----

*falling headlong over his feet.*

*----- Exit Roger into the bedroom*

**Burglar** I'm going to end up talking to myself...

*Exit the Burglar into study, unaware of Roger*

*Enter Philip from the downstairs bathroom. His right hand is still stuck to the tax demand, his left to the plate of sardines*

**Philip** Darling, this stuff that eats through anything. It eats through trousers!

*He examines holes burnt in the front of them.*

Darling, if it eats through trousers, you don't think it goes on and eats through... Listen, darling, I think I'd better get these trousers off! *(He begins to do so, as best he can)* Darling, I think I can feel it! I think it's eating through... absolutely everything!

*----- Enter Roger from the bedroom, still holding the sardines*

**Roger** There's something evil in this house.

*Philip pulls up his trousers*

*Dotty demonstrates to Belinda and Lloyd what she did, half delighted and half shocked at herself.*

**Philip** *(aside)* The Inland Revenue!

**Roger** *(sees Philip, frightened)* He's back!

*Everyone tries to see what's happening on stage, also half delighted and half-shocked.*

**Philip** I must go.

**Roger** Stay!

**Philip** I won't, thank you.

*Selsdon finds the bottle on the platform - yet another bottle!*

**Roger** Speak!

*Lloyd takes the whisky away from Selsdon mechanically.*

**Philip** Only in the presence of my lawyer.

*Lloyd, Dotty, and Belinda all take swigs from it in turns, absent-mindedly, as they follow events on stage.*

**Roger** Only in the presence of your... ? Hold on. You're not from the other world!

**Philip** Yes, yes - Marbella!

*Dotty holds up her hand to get attention to the events on stage. She demonstrates that Garry is going to have run downstairs.*

**Roger** You're some kind of intruder!

**Philip** Well, nice to meet you.

*He waves goodbye with his right*

*They all wait for the crash.*

*hand, then sees the tax demand on it,  
and hurriedly puts it away behind his  
back*

I mean, have a sardine.

*He offers the sardines on his left  
hand. His trousers, unsupported, fall  
down*

**Roger** No, you're not! You're some  
kind of sex maniac! You've done  
something to Vicki! I'm going to come  
straight downstairs...

*The sound of Garry falling downstairs*

----- *Roger falls downstairs.*

----

*Even Selsdon can hear it.*

*No sound from the stage. Everyone  
listens, and as they listen the laughter  
dies away.*

*Frederick, on stage, improvises a line.*

----- **Frederick** Are you all right?

----

*No reply.*

*Belinda turns to Dotty in horror - she's  
killed him! Belinda opens the study  
door to go to Garry. Lloyd restrains  
her.*

*At the sound of Garry's voice*

*----- they all relax.*

*Lloyd takes another swig of whisky.*

*Frederick makes his exit*

*-----*

*trousers round his ankles,  
handkerchief pressed to his nose. He  
looks into his handkerchief, and  
comes over faint. Belinda and Dotty  
catch him.*

*Lloyd remembers that Brooke has an  
entrance coming up. He attempts to  
peel the overcoat off her.*

*Brooke, recoiling from this, reverses  
into Belinda and Dotty, staggering  
under the weight of Frederick, and  
loses her lenses.*

*Belinda and Dotty drop Frederick and  
turn to deal with this next problem.*

*Garry repeats the cue. -----*

*Garry appears, still hobbled, in the study  
doorway, and furiously repeats the cue  
yet again.-----*

**----- Roger** *(faintly)* This is plainly a  
matter for the police. *(Into the phone)*  
Police!

**Philip** I think I'll be running along.

**-----** *He runs, his trousers still round  
his ankles, out through the front door*

**Roger** Come back.... ! *(Into the  
phone)* Hello... police? Someone has  
broken into my house! Or rather  
someone has broken into someone's  
house... No, but he's a sex maniac! I left  
a young woman here, and what's happened  
to her no one knows!

**-----** And what's happened to her no one  
knows!

**-----** No one knows!

*Belinda, Dotty, and Lloyd guide Brooke, blinded and confused, and still wearing her overcoat, to the window for her entrance, cracking her head against the set on the way. -----*

*They watch as Brooke falls headlong over the sofa onstage.*

*Selsdon suggests to Dotty that the lenses may be in her clothes.*

*Selsdon searches Dotty's clothes. She can't understand what he's after.*

*Garry comes hobbling and raging off,----- his shoes still tied today. He gazes in amazement at the sight of Dotty and Selsdon.*

*----- Enter Vicki through the window.*

**Vicki** There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

**Roger** *(into the phone)* Sorry... the young woman has reappeared. *(Hand over phone)* Are you all right?

**Vicki** No, he almost saw me!

**Roger** *(into the phone)* He almost saw her... Yes, but he's a burglar as well! He's taken our things!

**Vicki** *(finds Philip's bag and box)* The things are here.

**Roger** *(into the phone)* So what am I saying? I'm saying, let's say no more about it. *(He puts the phone down)* Well, put something on!

**Vicki** I haven't got anything!

**Roger** There must be something in the bathroom!*He picks up the box and bag and leads the way.*

Bring the sardines!

*She picks up the sardines.*

*----- Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the downstairs bathroom*

*Garry repeats the  
cue.-----*

*Lloyd realises, and rushes Selsdon  
on, as Frederick loads him with props.  
-----*

*Garry moves to commit violence upon  
everyone in sight, but the state of his  
shoes prevents him from getting more  
than a step or two before he has to  
return...*

*... to make his entrance. -----*

*Frederick takes over the search in Dotty's  
clothes.*

*Garry makes his exit  
-----and is amazed to see  
Dotty now apparently embracing  
Frederick.*

*Garry starts downstairs to attack  
Frederick. But he is still hobbled, and in*

----- Bring the sardines!

----- *Enter the Burglar from the study,  
and dumps more booty.*

**Burglar** Right, that's downstairs tidied  
up a bit. *(He starts upstairs.)* Just  
give the upstairs a quick going-over for  
them.

*Exit the Burglar into the mezzanine  
bathroom.*

----- *Enter Vicki, holding the sardines and  
a white bathmat, and Roger, carrying the  
box and bag, from the downstairs  
bathroom.*

**Vicki**A bathmat?

**Roger**Better than nothing!

**Vicki** I can't go around in front of our  
taxpayers wearing a *bathmat*!

*He leads the way upstairs.*

**Roger**I'll look in the bedroom. You look  
in the other bathroom.

----- *Exit Roger into the bedroom and  
Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom*

*any case...*

*Frederick has to make his entrance. -----*

*Brooke blindly makes her entrance. -----*

*Lloyd takes over the search of Dotty's clothing. Garry gazes in astonishment.*

*Tim enters from the dressing-rooms, and hands Lloyd a cactus.*

*Flavia watches this anxiously.-----*

*Lloyd hands the cactus to Dotty without looking at it while he searches.*

*Garry hobbles downstairs, takes the cactus from the distracted Dotty, and rams it into Lloyd's bottom. Then he hobbles back upstairs, still holding the cactus.*

*Lloyd tries to pursue him...*

*... but stops with a cry of pain. -----*

*Garry puts the cactus down on the platform. He takes the ends of the black and white bedsheets that are hanging up outside the bedroom door, waiting for Frederick and Brooke, and ties them together.*

*----- Enter Philip through the front door*

**Philip** Darling! Help! Where are you?

*----- Enter Vicki from the the mezzanine bathroom*

**Vicki** Roger! Roger!

*Exit Philip hurriedly, unseen by Vicki, into the downstairs bathroom*

There's someone in the bathroom now!

*Vicki runs towards the bedrooms, then stops.*

*----- **Flavia** (off) Oh, darling, I'm finding such lovely things!*

*Vicki turns and runs downstairs instead, as Flavia enters along the upstairs corridor, absorbed in the china tea service she is carrying.*

*Vicki exits hurriedly into the downstairs bathroom*

Do you remember this china tea service -

*----- Vicki screams, off*

- that you gave me on the very first anniversary of our... ?

*Enter Vicki from the downstairs bathroom. She stops at the sight of Flavia*

Who are you?

**Vicki** Oh no - it's his wife and dependents!

*She puts her hands over her face*

*Enter Philip from the downstairs*



*bathroom, still with his hands  
encumbered, holding the bathmat now as  
well, and keeping his trousers up with his  
elbows*

**Philip** Excuse me, I think you've dropped  
your dress.

*Flavia gasps. Philip looks up at the  
gallery and sees her*

*(To Flavia)* Where have you been? I've  
been going mad! Look at the state I'm in!

*He holds up his hands to show Flavia the  
state he is in, and his trousers fall down.  
The tea service slips from Flavia's  
horrified hands, and rains down on the  
floor of the living-room below. Philip  
hurries towards the stairs, trousers round  
his ankles, his hands extended in  
supplication.*

**Philip** Darling, honestly!

*Brooke makes her exit -----*

*----- Vicki flees before him, comes face to  
face with Flavia, and takes refuge in the  
linen cupboard*

*Brooke begins to take off her overcoat.*

*She just burst into the room and her dress  
fell off!*

*Garry picks up the cactus, but then has to  
hand it Brooke. She peers at it, baffled,  
while...*

*Exit Flavia, with a cry of pain, along the  
upstairs corridor*

*... Garry makes his entrance. -----*

*----- Enter Roger from the bedroom,  
directly in Philip's path*

*Brooke comes down from the platform  
holding the cactus, then stops in  
amazement, overcoat half on and half off,  
at the sight of Lloyd lowering his trousers  
and Dotty pulling needles out of his  
bottom.*

*Philip holds up the bathmat in front of his  
face. He is invisible to Roger, though,  
because the latter is holding up a white  
bedsheet.*

**Roger** Here, put this sheet on for the  
moment while I see if there's something in  
the attic.

*Garry makes his exit -----*

*----- Roger leaves Philip with the sheet*

*and also watches the scene below in amazement. So does Belinda.*

*Garry hobbles downstairs and takes the cactus from Brooke for use against Lloyd again.*

*Tim warns Lloyd about Garry.*

*Lloyd quickly pulls up his trousers.*

*Tim takes the cactus from Garry. Garry snatches it back, then has to hand it back to Tim anyway so that he can grab Vicki's dress from its hook and...*

*... make his entrance. -----*

*Lloyd lowers his trousers again for Dotty to resume operations.*

*Garry makes his exit ----- and Lloyd hurriedly decided that he needs no further attention.*

*and exits along upstairs corridor*

*Philip turns to go back downstairs.*

*Enter Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom, holding two gold taps*

**Burglar** One pair gold taps...

*He stops at the sight of Philip*

Oh, my Gawd!

**Philip** Who are you?

**Burglar** Me? Fixing the taps.

**Philip** Tax? Income tax?

**Burglar** That's right, governor. In come new taps ... out go old taps.

*Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom*

**Philip** Tax-inspectors everywhere!

**Roger** (off) Here you are!

**Philip** The other one!

*Exit Philip into the bedroom, holding the bathmat in front of his face*

*----- Enter Roger along the upstairs corridor, holding a holding Vicki's dress.*

**Roger** I've found your dress! It came flying out of the attic at me!

*----- Exit Roger into mezzanine bathroom*

*Enter Philip from the bedroom, trying to pull the bathmat off his head*

**Philip** Darling! I've got her dress stuck to my head now!

*Frederick makes his exit -----  
and picks up the bedsheets which are  
waiting for him and Brooke to put on. He  
flaps them at Brooke to remind her about  
her change.*

*Lloyd points out the flapping sheets to her,  
but she puts the overcoat back on to storm  
out again. Lloyd retains her desperately  
while he takes the cactus from Tim and  
gives it to her as a token of his enduring  
affection. She peers at it, and he takes in  
the nature of the present for the first time  
himself. He turns in pained query to Tim,  
who gestures that it was all the shop had  
left - all the rest of their stock is now on  
Poppy's desk.*

*Lloyd takes the cactus back and kisses it,  
with painful results, to present to Brooke  
again. Frederick flaps the sheets in  
desperation.*

*Brooke hesitates. Finally she takes off her  
overcoat runs up the steps with the cactus.*

*Selsdon makes his exit. -----*

*Enter Roger from the mezzanine bathroom*

*----- Exit Philip into the bedroom*

**Roger** Another intruder!

*Enter the Burglar from the mezzanine  
bathroom*

**Burglar** Just doing the taps, governor.

**Roger** Attacks? Not attacks on women?

**Burglar** Try anything, governor, but I'll  
do the taps on the bath first.

*Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom*

**Roger** Sex maniacs everywhere! Where  
is Vicki? Vicki ... ?

*Exit Roger into the downstairs bathroom*

*Enter Burglar from the mezzanine  
bathroom, heading for the front door*

**Burglar** People everywhere! I'm off. A  
tax on women? I don't know, they'll put a  
tax on anything these days.

*Enter Roger from the downstairs  
bathroom. The Burglar stops.*

**Roger** If I can't find her, you're going  
to be in trouble, you see.

**Burglar** WC? I'll fix it.

*Exit Burglar into the mezzanine  
bathroom again*

*----- Exit Burglar into the mezzanine*

*Brooke pushes the cactus into Selsdon's hands as she passes.*

*There is a swirl of sheets as Frederick attempts to dress Brooke in time for her entrance.*

*Frederick and Brooke make their separate entrances ----- and discover that they are unable to because their sheets are attached to each other.*

*Belinda, upstairs for her entrance, goes to disentangle them. So does Selsdon, but he and the cactus together makes things worse.*

*Frederick and Brooke are half on and half off ----- Garry watches with pleasure, until Lloyd furiously drives him...*

*... on stage to hold the fort. -----*

*Garry improvises -----*

*Tim takes off his raincoat and starts to put on the spare sheet to go on as Frederick's double. Lloyd rips it off him again, and gestures that it's needed as an emergency substitute for Frederick's sheet. They pass to the sheet to Frederick, but he is too entangled to do anything with it.*

*Belinda gestures desperately to Lloyd for the real Sheikh's robes. Lloyd passes them up to Belinda, who hands them to Frederick...*

*... who is dragged on ----- through the linen cupboard door by Brooke, still holding the second sheet and the real Sheikh's robes.*

*Flavia takes the cactus away from Selsdon, then hurriedly hands it down to Lloyd so that...*

*bathroom*

**Roger** Vicki ... ?

*Exit Roger through the front door*

*----- Philip attempts to enter from the bedroom.*

*----- Vicki attempts to enter from the linen cupboard.*

*----- Enter Roger through the front door*

**----- Roger** No sheikh yet! I thought he was coming at four? I mean, it's nearly, you know, four now... Well, it's after three... Because I've been standing here for a good, you know, it seems like forever... What's the time now. It must be getting on for five...

*----- Oh, you're here already, hiding in the, anyway... And this is your charming wife? So you want to see over the house now, do you, Sheikh? Right. Well. Since you're upstairs already -*

*Roger goes upstairs*

*... she can make her entrance. -----*

*Lloyd puts the cactus in a safe place on the chairs downstairs.*

*Tim puts on the bathmat as burnous, to go on as Philip's double, but gestures to Lloyd that he now has no sheet to wear, because it has vanished on stage with Frederick.*

*They both register despair.*

*Lloyd takes a despairing pull of whisky.*

*Belinda exits. -----*

*Lloyd and Tim indicate the problem of the missing sheet to her.*

*She instantly indicates Tim's own raincoat.*

*Lloyd puts it on Tim back to front.*

*They both gloomily inspect the result.*

*----- Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying a vase*

**Flavia** Him and his floozie! I'll break this over their heads!

*Roger, Philip and Vicki go downstairs*

**Roger** (to Philip and Vicki) I'm sorry about this. I don't know who she is. No connection with the house, I assure you.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, with another plate of sardines. Roger advances to introduce her*

**Mrs Clackett** No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines, 'cause this time I'm eating them.

*Roger ushers Philip and Vicki away from Mrs Clackett towards the mezzanine bathroom*

*He opens the door to the mezzanine bathroom*

But in here...

**Flavia** Arab sheets?

*----- Exit Flavia into the bedroom*

**Roger** In here we have...

*Enter the Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom*

**Burglar** Ballcocks, governor. Your ballcocks have gone.

**Roger** We have him.  
*Enter Flavia from the bedroom*

**Mrs Clackett** You give me that sheet, you devil!

*She seizes the nearest sheet, and it comes away in her hand to reveal Vicki*

*Flavia comes downstairs menacingly*

*Frederick makes his exit -----  
dragging Brooke backwards with him,  
since they are still attached to each other.*

*----- Exit Philip discreetly into the study.*

*Selsdon improvises a line. -----*

*----- **Burglar** It's my little girl! So far as I  
could see before she went.*

*Brooke struggles back on  
-----as best she can.*

*----- **Vicki** Dad!*

*Flavia stops*

*Tim makes his entrance in back-to-front  
raincoat. -----*

*----- Enter Philip from the study in  
amazement. (He is now played by a  
double - Tim)*

*Frederick has picked up the real burnous,  
and flaps it in desperation as he realises  
that the robes are still somewhere onstage.  
All Lloyd can find now as a substitute is  
Brooke's leopard-skin overcoat. He spins  
Frederick round to put it on him back to  
front, as he did with Tim and the raincoat.  
He then crams the burnous on Frederick's  
head, but Frederick has continued to turn,  
so it hangs over his face instead of his  
neck. Lloyd crams the Sheikh's dark  
glasses on top of the burnous...*

***Burglar** Our little Vicki, that ran away  
from home, I thought I'd never see again!*

***Flavia** (threateningly) So where's my  
other sheet?*

*... and Frederick stumbles blindly  
back on stage.  
-----*

*----- Enter through the front door a  
Sheikh, played by Frederick.*

***Sheikh** Ah! A house of heavenly peace!  
I rent it!*

*Lloyd picks up the whisky, takes a  
weary swig, and is just about to sit  
down on the cactus when he springs*

***Roger** Hold on, hold on... I know that  
face! (Pulls the Sheikh's burnous aside to  
reveal his face.) He isn't a sheikh! He's  
that sex-maniac!*

*up again guiltily, because Poppy is standing agitatedly in front of him. She takes the whisky away from him and puts it down, desperate to secure his full attention. She whispers urgently to him. He can't understand. She whispers again, becoming more and more agitated. He puts a hand to his ear, meaning he can't hear.*

**Poppy** *(screams to Lloyd in despair)*  
I'm going to have a...

*Selsdon flings the front door open.*

**Selsdon** Good old-fashioned plate of what...?

**Poppy** ... baby!

*Selsdon goes back on stage.-----*

*Poppy claps her hand over her mouth, horrified.*

**Lloyd** *(whispers)* And curtain, perhaps?

**Poppy** Oh...!

*She runs back to the corner to bring the curtain down.-----*

*They all fall upon him, and reveal that his trousers are around his ankles.*

**Burglar** And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke I won't ask. But I'll tell you one thing, Vicki.

**Vicki** What's that, Dad?

**Burglar** When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a...

*He dries.*

*Everyone on stage gasps. Their heads flick round, then back again.*

-----  
**Selsdon** A good old-fashioned plate of gravy!

----- CURTAIN

*Everyone appears in the doors and windows, eager to know more. Lloyd subsides, defeated, on to the cactus, and springs up again in agony.*

CURTAIN.



### ACT III

*The curtain goes up to reveal the tabs of the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees. A half-empty whisky bottle nestles at the foot of them. The introductory music for Nothing On.*

*As the music finishes the tabs begin to rise. A foot or two above stage level they stop uncertainly, hover for a moment, and fall again.*

*Pause.*

*The introductory music starts again, and is then faded out.*

*Enter Tim from the wings, in his dinner jacket, but with elements of the Burglar's gear visible beneath it, and the Burglar's cap on his head.*

**Tim**                      Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

*He removes the Burglar's cap.*

Welcome to the the Old Fishmarket Theatre, Lowestoft, or rather the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees, for this evening's performance of *Nothing On*. We apologise for the slight delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances...

**Belinda**                *(off, screaming but indistinguishable)* Hands off Freddie! All right?

**Dotty**                    *(off, screaming but indistinguishable)* You're the one who's trying to get their hands on Freddie!

**Tim**                    ... due to circumstances...

**Dotty**                    *(off, screaming but indistinguishable)* You don't own him, you know!

**Tim**                    ... beyond our control...

*The sound of a slap, off, and Dotty screams in pain, off.*

... and we would ask you to bear with us for a moment while we deal with her. With them. With the circumstances. I should perhaps say with tonight's performance of the play our long and highly successful tour...

**Poppy**                    *(over Tannoy)* Ladies and gentlemen. We apologise for the delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances which have...

**Belinda**                    *(over Tannoy)* Don't you dare! Don't you dare!

**Poppy**                    *(over Tannoy)* ... which have now been brought under control.

**Tim**                    ... our long and highly successful tour is on its very last legs. Its very last leg. Thank you for your...

**Poppy**                    Thank you for your...

**Tim & Poppy**                    *(together)* ... co-operation and understanding.

Tim

I sincerely trust...

*He pauses for an instant to see if he will be interrupted again.*

I sincerely trust there will be no other...

*He becomes aware of the whisky bottle.*

... no other hiccups. No other holdups. So, ladies and gentlemen, will you please sit back and enjoy the remains of the evening.

*Exit Tim. A slight pause, then his arm comes out from under the tabs and retrieves the bottle.*

*The introductory music for Nothing On, and this time the tabs rise. The act is being seen from the front again, exactly as it was the first time, at the rehearsal in Weston-super-Mare*

*Enter slowly and with dignity from the service quarters, limping painfully, Mrs Clackett. She is holding a plate in her left hand and a handful of loose sardines in her right.*

Mrs Clackett

*(bravely)* It's no good you going on...

*She stops and looks at the phone. It hurriedly starts to ring.*

I can't pick sardines off the floor *and* answer the phone.

*She dumps the handful of sardines on the plate.*

I've only got one leg.

*She shifts the plate to her right hand and picks up the phone with the left.*

(Into the phone, bravely) Hello... Yes, but there's no one here...  
No, Mr Brent's not here...

*She puts the plate of sardines newspaper down next to the newspaper on the sofa as she speaks and picks up the newspaper. She shakes the outer sheet free and wipes her oily hand on it as best she can. The rest of the newspaper disintegrates and falls back on top of the sardines.*

He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain. Mr Philip Brent, that's right... The one who writes the plays, only why he wants to get mixed up in plays God only knows, he'd be safer off in the lion's cage at the zoo... No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here... Am /in Spain...?

*She realises that she is holding the sheet of newspaper instead of the sardines. She turns round to look for them as she speaks, winding herself into the telephone cord.*

No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with...

*She sits down uncertainly on the heap of newspaper.*

... because it's the royal what's it called on the telly - the royal

you know...

*She realises that she is sitting on the sardines, and extracts the plate as discreetly as possible as she speaks.*

... And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house-agents, because they're the agents for the house... Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one...?

*She examines the flattened contents of the plate.*

No, they're not in Spain, they're just a bit squashed. Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on...

*She stands up to go, uncertainly balancing plate, sheet of newspaper, and phone.*

... I'm going to do something wrong here.

*She starts to go, then realises there are loose sheets of newspaper all over the floor, and bends down to pick them up. The sardines slide off the plate on to the floor.*

Always the same, isn't it.

*She starts to go again.*

One minute you've got too much on your plate...

*She realises that she has nothing on her plate, turns round and sees the sardines.*

... next thing you know they've gone again.

*She uncertainly drops a few sheets of the newspaper over the sardines and exits into the study, holding the empty plate and the telephone receiver. The body of the phone falls off its table and follows her to the door*

*The sound of a key in the lock. The front door opens. On the doorstep is Roger, carrying a cardboard box*

**Roger**

... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

*Enter Vicki*

*The body of the phone begins to creep inconspicuously towards the door*

So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

*Roger goes back and brings in a flight bag and closes the front door*

I'll just check.

*He halts the telephone with a casually placed foot.  
Vicki gazes round*

Hello? Anyone at home? No, there's no one here.

*He picks the phone up, and puts it back on its table*

So what do you think?

*He takes his hand off the phone, and it springs back on to the floor*

**Vicki** Great. And this is all yours?

*The phone starts to creep away again. Roger casually picks it up as he talks and puts it down on the sideboard*

**Roger** Just a little shack in the woods, really. Converted posset mill. Sixteenth-century.

**Vicki** It must have cost a bomb.

*Another jerk on the wire catapults the phone across the room. Vicki pays no attention to it*

**Roger** Well, one has to have somewhere to entertain one's business associates. Someone on the phone now, by the look of it.

*He picks the phone up and puts it back on the sideboard*

It's probably this, you know, this Arab saying he wants to come at four, so I mean I'll just have a word with him and...

*He tries to pick up the receiver and finds that it's not there. As the conversation continues he follows the receiver cord along with his hand*

**Vicki** Right, and I've got to get those files to our Basingstoke office

by four.

**Roger** Yes, we'll only just manage to pick it in. I mean, we'll only just fit it up. I mean...

**Vicki** Right, then.

**Roger** We won't bother to pull the champagne.

*He pulls gently at the cord*

**Vicki** All these doors!

**Roger** Oh, only a handful, really. Study... Kitchen... and a self-contained service flat...

*He tugs hard, and the cord comes away without the receiver*

... for the receiver.

**Vicki** Terrific. And which one's the... ?

**Roger** What?

**Vicki** You know...

**Roger** The usual offices? Through here, through here.

*He bundles up the phone and cable, and opens the downstairs bathroom door for her*



**Vicki**                      Fantastic.

*Exit Vicki into the bathroom. Roger tosses the phone casually off after her*

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, still walking with difficulty and holding the now cordless receiver.*

**Mrs Clackett**            I've lost the sardines again...

*Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom*

**Roger**                    I'm sorry. I thought there was no one here.

**Mrs Clackett**            I'm not here. *(She looks round for the phone, so that she can replace the receiver)* I don't know where I am.

**Roger**                    I'm from the agents.

**Mrs Clackett**            Lost the phone now.

**Roger**                    Squire, Squire, Hackham, and Dudley.

**Mrs Clackett**            Never lost a phone before.

**Roger**                    I'm Tramplemain.

**Mrs Clackett**            I'll just put it up here, look, if anyone wants it.

*She puts the receiver on top of the television.*

**Roger**                    Oh, right, thanks. No, I just dropped in to... go into a few

things...

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it. Mrs Clackett gets down on her hands and knees and looks under the newspaper.*

Well, to check some of the measurements...

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it. Mrs Clackett goes to scoop up the sardines, but then looks round.*

Do one or two odd jobs...

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.*

**Mrs Clackett**      Now the plate's gone.

**Roger**              Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective client over the house.

*The bathroom door opens.*

**Vicki**              What's wrong with this door?

*Roger closes it.*

**Roger**              She's thinking of renting it. Her interest is definitely aroused.

*Enter Vicki from the bathroom*

**Vicki**              That's not the bedroom.

**Roger**                    The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the...

*Roger steps forward on to the newspapers to introduce Mrs Clackett. His foot slides away in front of him.*

**Mrs Clackett**           Sardines, dear, sardines.

**Vicki**                    Oh. Hi.

**Roger**                    She's not really here.

**Mrs Clackett**           *(looking under the newspaper)* Oh, you shouldn't have stood on them.

**Roger**                    *(to Mrs Clackett)* Don't worry about us.

**Mrs Clackett**           They'll all go standing on them now.

**Roger**                    We'll just inspect the house.

**Mrs Clackett**           I'd better give the floor a wash.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, leaving the sardines beneath the newspaper on the floor*

**Roger**                    I'm sorry about this.

**Vicki**                    That's all tight. We don't want the television, do we?

**Roger**                    Television? That's right, television, she didn't explain about wanting to watch this royal, you know, because obviously

there's been this thing with the... *(He indicates the sardines.)*  
I mean, I'm just, you know, in case anyone's looking at all this  
and thinking, 'My God!'

**Vicki** Great. Come on, then. *(She starts upstairs)* I've got to be in  
Basingstoke by four.

**Roger** Sorry, love. I thought we ought to get that straight.

**Vicki** We'll take it up with us.

**Roger** Where are we?

**Vicki** And don't let my files out of sight.

**Roger** Hold on. We've got out of...

**Vicki** What?

**Roger** What?

**Vicki** Her?

**Roger** Her? OK...'her'. Right, because she *has* been in the family for  
generations.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, carrying a fire-bucket  
and a mop.*

**Mrs Clackett**            Sardines... Sardines... It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it - take the plunge...

*She plunges the mop into the fire-bucket.*

You'll really enjoy it here...

*She discovers that the mop won't go into the fire-bucket.*

**Vicki**                    Oh. Great.

*Mrs Clackett removes the obstruction - a bottle of whisky.*

**Mrs Clackett**            I'll put it here, look, then if he wants it he won't know where to find it...

*Mrs Clackett puts the bottle of whisky with the other bottles on the sideboard*

**Vicki**                    Terrific.

**Mrs Clackett**            Sardines, sardines.

*She hands the mop to Roger.*

You'll have to do the sardines, then, 'cause I've got to go back to the kitchen now and do some more sardines.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to service quarters*

Vicki                    You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

Roger                    *(contemplates the bucket and mop uncertainly)* Well...

Vicki                    I think she's terrific.

Roger                    Terrific.

Vicki                    So which way?

Roger                    I don't know - kind of parcel them up in the... *(He holds out some sheets of newspaper to her.)* And I'll... *(He demonstrates the mop.)*

Vicki                    *(Starts up the stairs.)* Up here?

Roger                    Down here!

Vicki                    In here?

Roger                    OK, I'll do the... *you* do the...

*Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom. Roger parcels up the sardines in the newspaper as best he can*

Vicki                    It's another bathroom.

*She reappears*

*Roger dumps the parcel of sardines on the telephone*

*table while he dabs hurriedly at the floor with the mop.*

**Roger** Take the box upstairs, then! Take the bag!

**Vicki** Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

**Roger** Bag! Box!

*Vicki moves to stand outside the airing cupboard.*

**Vicki** Oh, black sheets!

**Roger** *(runs to the stairs with bucket and mop, and holds them out to Vicki)* All right, take the... take the... take the...!

**Vicki** Oh, you're in a real state!

**Roger** *(despairingly)* Oh...!

*Roger runs back and abandons the bucket and mop to pick up the bag and box.*

**Vicki** You can't even get the door open.

*Exit Vicki into the bedroom*

*Roger runs back to collect the bucket and mop, just as the front door opens to reveal Philip, carrying a cardboard box.*

**Philip** No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember. We've got the place...

*Philip freezes, as Roger flees upstairs with the bag and the box. Philip follows Roger's progress out of the corner of his eye.*

*Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Garry's.*

*The bedroom door shuts in Roger's face. He opens the door again and exits into the bedroom with the bag and box.*

... entirely to ourselves.

**Flavia** Home.

**Philip** Home, sweet home.

**Flavia** Dear old house!

**Philip** Just waiting for us to come back!

**Flavia** *(producing the remains of the phone)* But how odd to find the telephone in the garden!

**Philip** I'll put it back.

*She hands him the phone - now in a very deteriorated condition - and he attempts to replace it on the telephone table. But it is still connected to its lead, which is too short, since it runs out through the downstairs bathroom door, and back in through the front door*



**Flavia** I thought I'd better bring it in.

**Philip** Very sensible.

*He tugs discreetly at the lead*

**Flavia** Someone's bound to want it.

**Philip** Oh dear. *(He tugs)*

**Flavia** Why don't you put it back on the table?

**Philip** The wire seems to be caught.

**Flavia** Oh, look, it's caught round the downstairs bathroom.

**Philip** So it is.

*Philip takes the phone back out of the front room.*

*Flavia with discreet violence pulls the lead out of the junction-box where it originates. Philip re-emerges with the phone through the downstairs bathroom*

**Flavia** I think I've disentangled it.

**Philip** I climbed through the bathroom window and... oh... oh...

*He takes the parcel of sardines off the telephone table and puts the telephone in its place*

**Flavia** It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!

**Philip** It's damned serious! If Inland Revenue find out we're in the...  
*Attempting to fold up the newspaper tidily, he becomes distracted by the contents that come oozing out over his hands. His voice dies away.*

**Flavia** ... country, even for one night...

**Philip** Sorry.

*He puts down the parcel of sardines on the sofa.*

Yes, because if Inland Revenue find out we're in the...

*He moves towards the champagne, and slides, exactly like Garry, on the oily patch on the floor. He stops and looks back on it in surprise.*

**Flavia** ... country...

**Philip** *(distracted)* ... Country...

**Flavia** ... even for one night.

**Philip** ... even for one night...

*Philip edges cautiously away from the oily patch.*

**Flavia** ... bang goes...

*He bangs into the bucket and mop.*

... our claim to be resident abroad...

*Philip fumbles for his handkerchief, and claps it to his nose.*

**Philip** Resident abroad. Absolutely. *(He looks into his handkerchief.)*

**Flavia** Bang goes most of this year's income.

**Philip** Most of this year's income... *(He puts the handkerchief away.)* So, yes, I think I'd better... *(He picks up bag and box, clutches them to himself for reassurance.)* ... go and have a little lie-down.

*He starts up the stairs.*

**Flavia** *(surprised, but rallying)* Lie-down, yes, well, why not? No children. No friends dropping in...

*She moves the sofa to cover the oily patch as she speaks.*

We're absolutely on our... Leave those!

**Philip** Oh, yes.

*Philip puts the bag and box down, but by this time he is already upstairs*

**Flavia** Downstairs! Not upstairs!

**Philip** I'm so sorry. I...

*He looks in his handkerchief again.*

Oh dear...

*He exits hurriedly into bedroom.*

**Flavia** *(picks up the fire-bucket and mop)* There is something to be said for being a tax exile...

*She flees upstairs with the fire-bucket and mop, laughing.*

Sh...! What? Inland Revenue may hear us!

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters carrying a fresh plate of sardines*

**Mrs Clackett** *(to herself)* What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

*She puts down the plate of sardines, and goes to sit on*

*the sofa, on the parcel of sardines left there by Philip*

**Flavia** *(urgently, looking down from the gallery, still holding the bucket and mop)* Mrs Newspaper!

*Mrs Clackett jumps up.*

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of the sofa!

**Flavia** So did mine! We thought you'd gone!

**Mrs Clackett** *(finding the parcel of sardines and examining it)* I thought you was in Sardinia!

**Flavia** We are! We are! You haven't seen us! We're not here!

**Mrs Clackett** I can guess which one of them put this here.

**Flavia** Yes, but the main thing is that the income tax are after us.

**Mrs Clackett** Lovely helping of sardines to sit on.

**Flavia** So if anybody asks for us, you don't know nothing. Anything. So I'll just... I'll just... get a hot water bottle.

*She goes towards the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Mrs Clackett** And off she goes without waiting to find out about his letters.

**Flavia** *(stops, realises despairingly)* His letters?

*Enter Philip groggily from the bedroom.*

**Philip** Letters? What letters? You forward all the mail, don't you?

**Mrs Clackett** Not presents from Sardinia, dear.

**Philip** I'm so sorry.

*Exit Philip into the bedroom.*

**Mrs Clackett** I'll show you where I put presents from Sardinia.

*She goes upstairs towards Flavia, who is still outside the mezzanine bathroom, carrying the bucket and mop, not sure which way to move.*

I put presents from Sardinia in the pigeonhouse.

**Flavia** In the *pigeonhouse*?

**Mrs Clackett** In the little pigeonhouse down here, love.

*She stuffs the parcel of sardines down the front of Flavia's dress. Flavia looks down at the dress, then at the fire-bucket and mop she is carrying. Mrs Clackett retires hurriedly back downstairs, and exits into the study, with Flavia after her.*

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, but with no tie on*

**Roger** Yes, but I could hear voices!

*He falls over Philip's bag and box*

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear*

**Vicki**                      Voices? What sort of voices?

**Roger**                     Box voices. I mean, *people's* boxes.

**Vicki**                     But there's no one here.

**Roger**                     Darling, I saw the door-handle move! And these bags... I'm not sure they were, you know, when we went into the, do you know what I mean?

**Vicki**                     I still don't see why you've got to put your tie on to look.

**Roger**                     *(picking up the bag and box)* Because if someone left these things outside the, I mean, come on, they obviously want them downstairs inside the, you know.

**Vicki**                     Mrs Clockett?

**Roger**                     It could be. Coming up here on her way to, well, carrying various, I mean, who knows?

**Vicki**                     *(looking over the banisters)* Oh look, she's opened our sardines.

*She moves to go downstairs. Roger puts down the bag and box outside the linen cupboard and grabs her*

**Roger**                     Come back!

**Vicki**                      What?

**Roger**                      I'll fetch them! You can't go downstairs like that.

**Vicki**                      Why not?

**Roger**                      Mrs Crackett.

**Vicki**                      Mrs Crackett?

**Roger**                      One has certain obligations.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, fishing sardines out of the front of her dress.*

**Mrs Clackett**            *(to herself)* Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like the Battle of Waterloo out there.

*Roger tries to pull open the linen cupboard door to conceal Vicki, but it is obstructed by the bag and box*

Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

**Roger**                      Yes, still poking, well, still pulling.

*He tugs at the door again, unaware of the obstruction, and the handle comes off as it opens.*

**Mrs Clackett**            Good job I can't see far with this leg.

*Roger moves the bag and box, gets Vicki inside the*

*linen cupboard, and rebalances the handle in place*

**Roger** Just, you know, trying all the doors and I mean checking all the doorhandles.

*He starts downstairs, carrying Philip's bag and box*

Mrs Blackett.

**Mrs Clackett** Clackett, dear, Clackett.

**Roger** Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house, Mrs Clackett?

**Mrs Clackett** I haven't seen no one, dear.

**Roger** I thought I heard a box. I mean, I found these voices.

**Mrs Clackett** Voices? There's no voices here, love.

**Roger** I must have imagined it.

**Philip** *(off)* Oh good Lord above!

*The colossal sound of Philip falling downstairs, off, taking half the platform with him, followed by a wailing groan.*

**Roger** I beg your pardon?

**Mrs Clackett** *(mimicking Philip)* Oh good Lord above!

*She crashes things about on the sideboard in imitation of the offstage crash, and ends the performance with a*



*wailing groan.*

**Roger**                      Why, what is it?

**Mrs Clackett**            The study door's open.

*She crosses and closes the door*

**Roger**                      They're going to want these inside the... *(He indicates the study)* So I'll put them outside the... *(He indicates the front door)* Then they can, do you know what I mean?

*Exit Roger through the front door, carrying the bag and box*

*Enter Flavia from the mezzanine bathroom, carrying a first-aid box. She sees the linen cupboard door swinging open as she passes, and pushes it shut, so that the latch closes. The handle comes off in her hand*

**Flavia**                      Nothing but flapping doors in this handle.

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom, holding the first-aid box and the handle. Enter from the study Philip, holding a tax demand and its envelope. The part is now being played not by Frederick but by Tim*

**Philip/Tim**                ... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint... proceedings in court...

**Mrs Clackett**            Oh my Lord, who are you?

**Philip/Tim** I'm Philip.

**Mrs Clackett** You're Philip? What happened to you?

**Philip/Tim** Well, it's all got a bit slippery on the stairs out there.

**Mrs Clackett** You haven't done himself an injury?

**Philip/Tim** No. He's just a bit shaken. I'll be all right in a minute.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to the study*

**Mrs Clackett** You weren't going to tell me a gentleman had come about the house, were you?

*(off)* What?

**Philip/Tim** You weren't going to tell me a gentleman had come about the house?

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study*

**Mrs Clackett** That's right. A gentleman come about the house.

**Philip/Tim** Don't tell me. I'm not here.

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, and he's put your box out in the garden for you.

**Philip/Tim** Let them do anything. Just so long as you don't tell anyone we're here.

**Mrs Clackett** So I'll just sit down and turn on the... sardines, I've forgotten the sardines! *(She finds the second plate of sardines on the*

*table, exactly where she put it.) Oh, no, I haven't - I've remembered the sardines! What a surprise! I must go out to the kitchen and make another plate of sardines to celebrate.*

*Exit Mrs Clackett to the service quarters*

**Philip/Tim** I didn't get this! I'm not here. I'm in Spain. But if I didn't get it I didn't open it.

*Enter Flavia from the bedroom. She is holding the dress that Vicki arrived in, and the handle of the linen cupboard*

**Flavia** Darling... *(She stares at Philip/Tim in surprise, then recovers herself and looks at the dress)* I never had a handle like this, did I?

**Philip/Tim** *(abstracted)* Didn't you?

**Flavia** I shouldn't buy anything as brassy as this.

*Flavia drops the dress and attempts to replace the handle on the linen cupboard behind her back*

Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

**Philip/Tim** I should never have touched it.

**Flavia** No, it's lovely.

**Philip/Tim** Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.

*Exit Philip/Tim into study*

**Flavia**

Well, I'll put it in the attic, if anyone else wants to have a try.

*Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor, taking the handle but leaving the dress on the floor*

*Enter Roger through the front door, without the bag and box*

**Roger**

All right, all right... Now the study door's open again! What's going on?

*He goes towards the study, and opens and closes the door. He reacts to the sound of urgent knocking overhead*

Knocking

*Knocking.*

Upstairs!

*He runs upstairs. Knocking*

Oh my God, there's something in the... *(He discovers the lack of a handle)* Oh my God! *(Knocking)* Listen! I can't, because the handle has, you know. You'll just have to...

*He demonstrates pushing. Knocking*

Come on! Come on!

*Knocking*

I mean, whatever it is in there. Can you hear me? Darling!

*Knocking*

Look, don't just keep banging! There's nothing I can, I mean it won't, there's nowhere to...

*Knocking. He opens the bedroom door*

Listen! Climb round into the... *(He indicates the bedroom)*  
Squeeze through the, youknow, and shin down the, I mean,  
there must be *some* way!

*Knocking*

Oh, for pity's sake!

*Exit Roger into the bedroom*

*Enter Philip from the study, holding a tax demand and an envelope. He is now being played by Frederick, with a plaster on his head.*

**Philip**

'... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint... proceedings in court...'

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, pulling Vicki after him.  
Philip gazes at them, baffled*

**Roger**

Oh, it's you.

**Vicki** Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark with all black sheets and things.

**Roger** I put you in *there*, but you managed to squeeze through the, you know.

**Vicki** Why did *I* lock the door? Why did *you* lock the door!

**Roger** I couldn't, I mean, look, look, it's come off!

**Vicki** *Someone* locked the door!

**Philip** Sorry.

*Exit Philip apologetically into study*

**Roger** Anyway, we can't stand here like this.

**Vicki** Like what?

**Roger** I mean, you know, with people going in and out.

**Vicki** OK, I'll take it off.

**Roger** In here, in here!

*He ushers her into the bedroom*

*Enter Philip cautiously from the study, holding the tax demand and the envelope*

**Philip**                   '... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint... proceedings in court...'

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the first-aid box*

*He looks up and down the landing*

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom*

*Philip stares at them*

**Vicki**                   Now what?

**Roger**                   A hot water box! /didn't put it there!

**Vicki**                   /didn't put it there.

**Philip**                   Sorry.

*Exit Philip into the study*

**Roger**                   Someone in the bathroom, filling first aid bottles.

*Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom*

**Vicki**                   *(anxious)* You don't think there's something creepy going on?

*Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor*

**Flavia**                   Darling... Darling?

*Enter Philip cautiously from the study. He raises the income tax demand to speak*

Darling, are you coming to bed or aren't you?

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom*

*Philip raises his income tax demand to speak*

*Enter Roger and Vicki from the mezzanine bathroom*

**Roger**                      What did you say?

**Vicki**                      I didn't say anything.

*Exit Philip into the study*

**Roger**                      I mean, first there's the door handle. Now there's the first water box.

**Vicki**                      I can feel goose-pimples all over.

**Roger**                      Yes, quick, get something round you.

**Vicki**                      Get the covers over our heads.

*Roger is about to open the bedroom door*

**Roger**                      Just a moment. What did I do with those sardines?

*He goes downstairs. Vicki makes to follow*



You - wait here.

**Vicki**                    *(uneasily)* You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.

**Roger**                    Yes, but this one has been extensively modernized throughout. I can't see how anything creepy would survive oil-fired central heating and ...

**Vicki**                    What? What is it?

*Roger looks round.*

What's happening?

**Roger**                    The sardines. They've gone. *(He double-takes on them)* No, they haven't. They're here. Oh. Well. My God... I mean... my God!

*He turns and starts back upstairs*

*Flavia crawls through the front door. She picks up the sardines and takes them back to the front door*

You put a plate of sardines down for two minutes, and the last thing you expect to find, I mean, these days, the one thing you don't expect to find when you come back is a plate of, I mean that's *really* weird!

**Vicki**                    Perhaps there is something funny going on. I'm going to get into bed and put my head under the ...

*She freezes at the sight of the empty table outside the bedroom door*

**Roger**                      Because, I mean, there they are! Exactly where I ...

*He realizes that the sardines are not there*

**Vicki**                      Bag ...

*Roger goes back downstairs to investigate. Vicki runs after him. Flavia, unseen by Garry, hesitates. She glances up towards the landing, reminded by the mention of the bag that she has failed to set it. She looks back at the table, realising that Roger now expects the sardines to be on the table.*

**Roger**                      No, they're not. I suppose Mrs Sprockett must have, I mean, what *is* going on?

*He looks at Vicki. Flavia hurriedly replaces the sardines.*

**Vicki**                      Bag!

*Flavia exits hurriedly through the front door*

**Roger**                      Bag?

**Vicki**                      Bag! Bag!

*She drags Roger back upstairs*

**Roger**                    What do you mean, bag, bag?

*Roger looks over the banisters and sees the sardines*

**Roger**                    Sardines!

**Vicki**                    Bag! Bag! Bag!

**Roger**                    Sardines! Sardines!

**Vicki**                    Bag! Bag! Bag!

**Roger**                    Sardines! Sardines!

**Vicki**                    Bag! Bag! Bag!

*While Roger is gazing at the sardines, and Vicki is looking at Roger, the bedroom door opens, and Flavia puts the flight bag on the table outside*

**Roger**                    *(tearing himself away from the sight of the sardines)* Bag?  
What bag?

**Vicki**                    *(gazing at the bag)* No bag!

**Roger**                    No bag?

**Vicki**                    Your bag! Suddenly! Here! Now - gone!

**Roger**                    It's in the bedroom. *(He sees the bag)* It was in the bedroom.  
I put it in the bedroom. I'll put it back in the bedroom.

*As Roger goes to open the bedroom door it opens in front of him, and Flavia begins to come out carrying the box*

**Vicki** Don't go in there!

*Roger finds himself holding the box, with the door closing his face.*

**Roger** The box!

**Vicki** The box?

**Roger** They've *both* not gone!

**Vicki** Oh! My files!

**Roger** What on earth is happening? Where's Mrs Spratchett?

*He starts downstairs with the bag and box. Vicki follows him*

You wait in the bedroom.

**Vicki** No! No! No!

*She runs downstairs*

**Roger** At least put your dress on!

**Vicki** I'm not going in there!

**Roger** I'll fetch it for you, I'll fetch it for you!

*He puts the bag and box down at the head of the stairs, returns to the bedroom, and sees the dress on the floor*

*Exit Roger into the bedroom*

**Vicki** Yes, quick - let's get out of here!

*Enter Roger from the bedroom*

**Roger** Your dress has gone.

*As he speaks he slides the dress over the edge of the gallery with his foot to get rid of it. It falls on top of Vicki beneath, and makes her jerk her head. She feels blindly around her; her lenses have gone again.*

**Vicki** I'm never going to see Basingstoke again!

**Roger** Don't panic! Don't panic! There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this.

*He starts downstairs, looking over the banisters, appalled at the sight of Vicki below, and falls headlong over the bag and box at the top of the stairs*

*Vicki searches blindly behind the sofa for her missing lenses.*

*Enter Philip from the study. He is holding the tax demand and the envelope.*

**Philip** ... final notice... steps will be taken... restraint...

*His voice dies away at the sight of Roger lying at the bottom of the stairs*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying further pieces of bric-a-brac*

**Flavia** Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic...

**Philip** *(to Roger)* Oh dear. *(He claps a handkerchief to his nose.)*

**Flavia** Oh great heavens!

*She rushes downstairs*

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, holding another plate of sardines*

**Mrs Clackett** No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines...  
*She sees Roger.*

... 'cause this time she has, she's gone and killed him!

**Flavia** He's stunned, that's all. Keep going.

**Roger** *(lifting his head)* Don't panic! Don't panic!

**Flavia** He's all right! Just keep going!

**Roger**                    There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this.

**Mrs Clackett**            Where are we?

**Roger**                    I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening...

**Mrs Clackett**            You've fetched her. I'm here.

**Roger**                    I've fetched Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening.

**Mrs Clackett**            She won't, you know.

**Flavia**                    ///tell you what's happening.

**Roger**                    There's a man in there! Yes?

**Flavia**                    He's not in there, my precious - he's in here, look, and so am I.

**Mrs Clackett**            No, no, there's no one in the house, love. Yes?

**Flavia**                    No, look, I know this is a great surprise for everyone. I mean, it's quite a shock for us, finding a man lying at the bottom of the stairs! *(To Philip)* Isn't it, darling?

**Philip**                    Oh dear. *(He looks into his handkerchief)* Oh dear oh dear.  
*(He sits down hurriedly.)*

**Flavia**                    But now we've all met we'll just have to... Well, we'll just have to introduce ourselves! Won't we, darling?

**Philip**                    Introduce ourselves. *(He struggles to his feet, but has to sit down again.)* I'm so sorry.

**Flavia** This is my husband. I'm afraid surprises go straight to his nose!

*Vicki rises blindly from behind sofa at her cue.*

**Vicki** There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

**Flavia** Oh, how delightful - another unexpected guest. *(To Vicki)* So why don't you... why don't you... see what you can see in the garden?

*She pushes Vicki out of the front door, and helps Philip to his feet.*

*(to Philip)* And darling, you go off and get that bottle marked poison in the downstairs loo. That eats through anything.

**Philip** *(from behind his handkerchief)* Eats through anything. Right. Thank you. Thank you. Yes, I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

*He opens the downstairs bathroom door to go off. A pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch. The window opens, and through it appears the Burglar, played by Tim*

**Burglar/Tim** No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in, and looks round in surprise to find the*



*room full of people*

**Mrs Clackett** Come in and join the party, love.

**Flavia** A burglar! This is most exciting!

**Philip** Oh dear, this is my fault. Because when I say, 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, this is ridiculous', and I open this door...

*He opens the downstairs bathroom again. Another pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through*

*Enter through the window the Burglar, played by Selsdon*

**Burglar/Selsdon** No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in, becoming uneasily aware of the others as he does so*

**Burglar/Tim** No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep.

**Mrs Clackett** I know, love, it's getting like a funeral in here.

**Burglar/Selsdon** When I think I used to do banks!

**Flavia** Just keep going.

**Burglar/Selsdon and**

**Burglar/Tim**

*(together)*

When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags ...

**Flavia**

Keep going.

**Burglar/Selsdon**

Stop?

**Flavia**

No, no!

**Burglar/Selsdon**

I thought the coast was clear, you see. I saw him going out to the bathroom.

**Flavia**

*(closing the downstairs bathroom door)* Yes, never mind, it's all right. We'll think of something.

**Burglar/Selsdon**

Oh, no, I was listening most carefully. What's it he says?

**Philip**

'I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.'

**Burglar/ Selsdon**

And he opened the door ...

*Burglar/Selsdon opens the downstairs bathroom door to demonstrate*

*A third pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through. Enter through the window the Burglar, played by Lloyd*

**Burglar/Lloyd**

No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in, very uncertain what's happening to him.  
He doesn't know whether to react to the presence of  
the others or not*

**Mrs Clackett** They always come in threes, don't they.

**All 3 Burglars** When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults...

**Flavia** Hold on! We know this man! He's not a burglar!

*She snatches Lloyd's Burglar hat off.*

He's our social worker!

**Roger** He's *what?*

**Flavia** He's that nice man who comes in and tells us *what to do!*

**Lloyd** (*appalled, faintly*) What to do?

**Others** (*firmly*) What to do!

*Lloyd is paralysed with stage-fright. He looks round helplessly and makes vague and ineffectual gestures.*

**Selsdon** What's he saying?

**Flavia** He's saying, he's saying - just get through it for doors and sardines! Yes? That's what it's all about! Doors and sardines! (*To Lloyd*) Yes?

**Lloyd** (*helplessly*) Doors and sardines!

**Others:** Doors and sardines!

*They all try to put this into practice. Philip picks up the sardines and runs around trying to find some application for them. The others open various doors, fetch further plates of sardines, and run helplessly around with them. Lloyd stands helplessly watching the chaos he has created swirl around him.*

**Flavia** He's saying, he's saying - 'Phones and police'!

**Lloyd** Phones and police...

**Philip** Phone!

*Philip and Roger are each handed a half of the phone.*

**Roger** Police!

*Roger puts the receiver to his ear. Philip dials.*

**Flavia** He's saying 'Bags and boxes.'

**Others** Bags and boxes!

*Everyone runs around with the two boxes and the two bags, all helplessly colliding with each other and running into the furniture.*

**Flavia** *(decisively)* Sheets, sheets! He's saying 'Sheets'!

**Lloyd** Sheets...

**Others** *(desperately)* Sheets!

*Roger runs out of the study door, Tim out of the front door.*

**Flavia** He's saying 'All we want now is a nice happy ending!'

*Roger comes back at once propelling the helpless Vicki, wrapping her in the white sheet as they go. Tim comes back simultaneously with Poppy, cramming her into the real Sheikh's robes.*

**Dotty** *(looking at Poppy)* And here she is! In her wedding dress!

**Flavia** *(looking at Vicki)* Yes, yes - it's their wedding day!

**Mrs Clackett** *(still looking at Poppy)* It's their wedding day!

**Others** Ah!

**Flavia** What a happy ending!

*Mrs Clackett pushes Poppy to Lloyd's side. Flavia pushes Vicki to his other side.*

**Mrs Clackett** Do you take this sheet to be your lawful wedded wife? If not, speak now, or forever hold your peace.

*Lloyd nods helplessly.*

**Selsdon** What's he saying, what's he saying?

**Flavia** He's saying... he's saying... 'Last line!'

**Selsdon** Last line? Me?

**All** Last line, last line!

**Selsdon** When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a good old-fashioned plate of.....

*He dries.*

**All** *(holding up plates of sardines; beseechingly)* Curtain!

*Tableau. Then Tim runs hurriedly off.*

*CURTAIN.*

*Except that it jams just above the level of their heads.*

*As one man they seize hold of it and drag it down. A*

*ripping sound. The curtain detaches itself from its*

*fixings and falls on top of them all, leaving a floundering mass of bodies on stage.*