

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.

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.

Noises Off was first presented, by arrangement with Michael Codron, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on 23 February 1982, and on 31 March by Michael Codron at the Savoy Theatre, London, with the following cast:

DOTTY OTLEY	Patricia Routledge
LLOYD DALLAS	Paul Eddington
GARRY LEJEUNE	Nicky Henson
BROOKE ASHTON	Rowena Roberts
POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR	Yvonne Antrobus
FREDERICK FELLOWES	Tony Matthews
BELINDA BLAIR	Jan Waters
TIM ALLGOOD	Roger Lloyd Pack
SELSDON MOWBRAY	Michael Aldridge
ELECTRICIAN	Ray Edwards

Directed by Michael Blakemore
Designed by Michael Annals
Lighting by Spike Gaden

On Sunday December 11 1983 it was first presented in the USA, at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York, by James Nederlander, Robert Fryer, Jerome Minskoff, the Kennedy Centre, and Michael Codron, in association with Jonathan Farkas and MTM Enterprises Inc, with the following cast:

DOTTY OTLEY	Dorothy Loudon
LLOYD DALLAS	Brian Murray
GARRY LEJEUNE	Victor Garber
BROOKE ASHTON	Deborah Rush
POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR	Amy Wright
FREDERICK FELLOWES	Paxton Whitehead
BELINDA BLAIR	Linda Thorson
TIM ALLGOOD	Jim Piddock
SELSDON MOWBRAY	Douglas Seale

Directed by Michael Blakemore
Designed by Michael Annals
Lighting designed by
Martin Aronstein

It was revived in its present form by the Royal National Theatre, in association with the Ambassador Theatre Group and Act Productions Ltd. It previewed in the Lyttleton Theatre on 29 September 2000, and opened on October 5, with the following cast:

DOTTY OTLEY	Patricia Hodge
LLOYD DALLAS	Peter Egan
GARRY LEJEUNE	Aden Gillett
BROOKE ASHTON	Natalie Walter
POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR	Selina Griffiths
FREDERICK FELLOWES	Jeff Rawle
BELINDA BLAIR	Susie Blake
TIM ALLGOOD	Paul Thornley
SELSDON MOWBRAY	Christopher Benjamin

<i>Directed by</i>	Jeremy Sams
<i>Designed by</i>	Robert Jones
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Tim Mitchell
<i>Sound Designer</i>	Fergus O'Hare for Aura

On Monday 14 May 2001 this production opened at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, with the same cast except for:

DOTTY OTLEY	Lynn Redgrave
GARRY LEJEUNE	Stephen Mangan

On Thursday 9 November 2001 the new version was first presented in the USA, at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York, by the Ambassador Theatre Group and ACT Productions, Waxman/Williams Entertainment, D Harris/MSwinsky, USA Otstar Theatricals, and Nederlander Presentations Inc, in the Royal National Theatre Production, with the following cast:

DOTTY OTLEY	Patti LuPone
LLOYD DALLAS	Peter Gallagher
GARRY LEJEUNE	Thomas McCarthy
BROOKE ASHTON	Katie Finneran
POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR	Robin Weigert
FREDERICK FELLOWES	Edward Hibbert
BELINDA BLAIR	Faith Prince
TIM ALLGOOD	T R Knight
SELSDON MOWBRAY	Richard Easton

<i>Directed by</i>	Jeremy Sams
<i>Designed by</i>	Robert Jones
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Tim Mitchell
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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

Dotty Only it's like a fruit machine in there.

Lloyd I know that, Dotty.

Dotty I open my mouth, and I never know if it's going to come out three oranges or two lemons and a banana.

Lloyd Anyway, it's not midnight yet. We don't open till tomorrow. So you're holding the receiver.

Dotty I'm holding the receiver.

Lloyd 'Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on...'

Dotty resumes her performance as Mrs Clackett

Mrs Clackett	Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, don't go away, I'm putting it down.
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She replaces the receiver

	Always the same, isn't it. Put your feet up for two minutes, and immediately they come running after you.
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Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper

Only she isn't holding the newspaper

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.

Mrs Clackett 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?

Closes the door

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 *(putting down the box and opening the flight bag)* We won't bother to chill the champagne.

Vicki All these doors!

Roger Oh, only a handful, really.

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 ...

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?

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...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it

Well, to check some of the measurements...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it

Do one or two odd jobs...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it

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 - *I* 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?

Lloyd You certainly have, Garry. Got that, Poppy ?

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.

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

Roger Only she's been in the family for generations.

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

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.

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. Roger follows*

Vicki Oh, black sheets! *(She produces one)*

Roger It's the airing cupboard *(He throws the sheet back)*

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

Only the door won't stay closed. A pause, while Garry struggles to open the door upstairs, and Frederick struggles to close the door downstairs

Lloyd And God said, Hold it. And they held it. And God saw that it was terrible.

Garry *(to Frederick and Belinda, the actor and actress playing Philip and Flavia).* Sorry, loves, this door won't open.

Belinda Sorry, love, this door won't close.

Lloyd And God said, 'Poppy!'

Frederick Sorry, everyone. Am I doing something wrong? You know how stupid I am about doors.

Belinda Freddie, my sweet, you're doing it perfectly.

Frederick As long as it's not me that's broken it.

Enter Poppy from the wings

Lloyd And there was Poppy. And God said, Be fruitful and multiply, and fetch Tim to fix the doors.

Exit Poppy into the wings

Belinda Oh, I love technicals!

Garry She loves technicals! *(Fondly)* Isn't she just, I mean,

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.

Lloyd You're not trying to do too much, are you, Tim?

Belinda Tim, my love, this door won't close.

Garry And the bedroom won't, you know.

Tim Oh, right. *(He sets to work on the doors)*

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

Lloyd Don't worry, Tim. Only another twenty-four hours, and it'll be the end of the day.

Lloyd comes up on stage

Belinda Oh, look, he's come down to earth amongst us.

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.

Belinda Oh, Lloyd, you're so deep.

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.

Enter Poppy from the wings

Poppy He's not in the dressing-room.

Dotty You've looked in the lavatories?

Poppy Yes.

Dotty And the scenery dock and the prop room and the paint store?

Poppy Yes.

Frederick *(to Dotty)* You've worked with him before, of course.

Lloyd *(to Poppy)* Ring the police.

Exit Poppy into the wings

(To Tim) Finished the doors? Right, get the Burglar gear on.

Exit Tim into the wings

Enter Selsdon Mowbray from the back of the stalls. He is in his seventies, and is wearing his Burglar gear. He comes down the aisle during the following dialogue, and stands in front of the stage, watching everyone on it

I'm sorry, Dotty, my love.

Dotty No, it's my fault, Lloyd, my love.

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 Seldson 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.'

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

Lloyd Door closed, love.

Garry closes the door

Vicki You can't even get the door open.

Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the bedroom

Enter Philip through the front door

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

Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Garry's.

We've got the place entirely to ourselves.

Philip closes the door

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 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?

Mrs Clackett I've put them all in the pigeonhouse.

Philip In the *pigeonhouse*?

Mrs Clackett In the little pigeonhouse in your desk, love.

Exeunt Mrs Clackett and Philip into the study. Philip is still holding the bag and box

Only he remains on, and Dotty remains in the doorway waiting for him

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?

Lloyd Hold it. Freddie, what's the trouble?

Frederick Lloyd, you know how stupid I am about moves. Sorry, Garry... Sorry, Brooke... It's just my usual dimness. *(To Lloyd)* But why do I take the things off into the study? Wouldn't it be more natural if I left them on?

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!

Roger Darling, I saw the door-handle move! It could be someone from the office, checking up.

Vicki I still don't see why you've got to put your tie on to look.

Roger Mrs Crackett.

Vicki Mrs Crackett?

Roger One has to set an example to the staff.

Vicki *(looks over the bannisters)* Oh, look, she's opened our sardines.

She moves to go downstairs. Roger 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. 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?
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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>
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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!

Roger Anyway, we can't stand here like this.

Vicki Like what?

Roger In your underwear.

Vicki OK, I'll take it off.

Roger In here, in here!

He ushers her into the bedroom

Only she remains on, blinking anxiously, and peering about the floor. Garry waits for her, holding the bedroom door open

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

Philip Darling, this glue. Is it the sort you can never get unstuck...?

Lloyd Hold it.

Philip Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.

Lloyd Hold it. We have a problem.

Frederick *(to Brooke)* Oh, bad luck! Which one is it this time?

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.

Lloyd You mean blood?

Frederick Oh dear. (*He has to sit down again.*)

Belinda (*to Frederick*) We all understand, my precious.

Lloyd All right, clear the stage. Walking wounded carry the stretcher cases.

Lloyd returns to the stalls, Dotty to the service quarters, Poppy to the wings. Garry and Brooke go upstairs. Belinda helps Frederick to his feet.

Right, then. On we bloodily stagger.

Frederick has to reach for a chair again.

Oh, sorry, Freddie. Let me rephrase that. On we blindly stumble. Brooke, I withdraw that.

Exit Belinda along the upstairs corridor, Frederick into study

From your exit, anyway. 'OK, I'll take it off.... In here, in here.'
Where's Selsdon?

Garry Selsdon!

Lloyd Selsdon!

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.'

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

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 stares at the telephone table in silence

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

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!

She runs downstairs

Roger At least put you dress on!

Vicki I'm not going in there!

Roger I'll fetch it for you, I'll fetch it for you!

Exit Roger into the bedroom

Vicki Yes, quick - let's get out of here!

Enter Roger from the bedroom

Roger Your dress has gone.

Vicki I'm never going to see Basingstoke again!

Roger goes downstairs

Roger 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!

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 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.

Exit Philip into the downstairs bathroom

Pause

Lloyd Selsdon...? You're on, Selsdon. We're there.
The moment's arrived...

Belinda *(off)* It's all right, love. He's coming, he's coming...

Lloyd But his arm should be coming through that window even before Freddie's off!

A pane of glass shatters in the mullion window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch

Lloyd Ah. And here it is.

The window opens, and through it appears an elderly Burglar. He has great character, but is in need of extensive repair and modernization

Burglar 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

between Freddie's exit and my entrance.

Lloyd No, Selsdon. Listen. Don't worry. I've got it.

Selsdon Yes?

Lloyd How about coming on a little earlier?

Selsdon We're obviously thinking along the same lines.

Exit Selsdon through the window

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

Right, Freddie, from your exit.

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

Exit Philip into downstairs bathroom

Enter Burglar as before, but on time

Burglar No bars, no burglar alarms. 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 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>
Roger	... 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!

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 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...

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...

	<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.

Philip pulls up his trousers

Philip *(aside)* The Inland Revenue!

Roger *(sees Philip, frightened)* 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.

He waves goodbye with his right 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...!

Roger comes downstairs and dials 999

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! *(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!

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?

Roger (into the phone) So what am I saying? I'm saying, let's say no more about it. (He puts the phone down) I thought something terrible had happened to you!

Vicki It has! I know him!

Roger You know him?

Vicki He's dealt with by our office!

Roger He's just an ordinary sex maniac.

Vicki Yes, but he mustn't see me like this! You have to keep up certain standards if you work for Inland Revenue!

Roger 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

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!*

Roger The bedroom, then! There must be something in the bedroom!

He leads the way upstairs.

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.

Exit Roger into the bedroom and Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom

Enter Philip through the front door

Philip

Darling! Help! Where are you?

Enter Vicki from 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

Darling, honestly!

Vicki flees before him, comes face to face with Flavia, and takes refuge in the linen cupboard

She just burst into the room and her dress fell off!

Exit Flavia, with a cry of pain, along the upstairs

corridor

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.

Roger Here, put this sheet on for the moment while I see if there's something in the attic.

Roger leaves Philip with the sheet 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 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!

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

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 *(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

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.

He ushers Philip and Vicki away from Mrs Clackett towards the mezzanine bathroom

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.

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

Flavia They're *Irish* sheets! Irish linen sheets off my own bed!

Mrs Clackett Oh, the thieving devils!

Roger In the *study*, however ...

Mrs Clackett You give me that sheet, you devil!

She seizes the nearest sheet, and it comes away in her hand to reveal Vicki

Oh, and there she stands in her smalls, for all the world to see!

Roger It's you!

Flavia It's her!

Flavia comes downstairs menacingly

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 Selsdon 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 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 ...

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!

Enter Lloyd with his arm round Brooke

Lloyd OK. All forgotten. I was irresistible.

Poppy I think I'm going to be sick.

Exit Poppy into the wings

Dotty Oh, no!

Lloyd Oh, for heaven's *sake!*

Exit Lloyd after Poppy

Garry You mean ... ?

Selsdon Her, too?

Frederick Oh great Scott!

Belinda Well, that's something I *didn't* know.

Brooke I think I'm going to faint.

Dotty Yes, sit down, love!

They sit Brooke down.

Belinda Quick - do your meditation.

Selsdon Well, that's something *she* didn't know!

Belinda Hush, love.

Dotty Two weeks' rehearsal, that's all we've had.

Frederick Whatever next?

Selsdon *Most* exciting!

Belinda *(indicating Brooke)* Sh!

Selsdon Oh, yes. Sh!

Dotty Here he comes.

Enter Lloyd from the wings, subdued

Is she all right, love?

Lloyd She'll be all right in a minute. Something she ate, probably.

Garry *(indicating Brooke)* Yes, this one's feeling a bit, you know.

Lloyd I'm feeling a bit, you know, myself. I think I'm going to -

Belinda Which?

Garry *(offering a chair)* Faint?

Belinda (*offering a vase*) Or be sick?

Lloyd (*subsides on to the chair*) - need that tea break.

Dotty You're certainly overdoing it at the moment, love.

Lloyd So could we just have the last line of the act?

Selsdon Me? Last line? Right.

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

Selsdon ... what?

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

Selsdon What did she say?

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

She hands him Mrs Clackett's 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...

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!

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.

Tabs 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.

Belinda has to break off to remind Brooke to...

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?

... push the bathroom door open.-----

Roger I'm from the agents. I just dropped in to... go into a few things.

----- 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 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!

Dotty breaks away from Garry and goes to make her entrance. Selsdon points out that she is still holding the whisky.

Garry takes it off her as she makes her entrance.

Selsdon tries to get the whisky off Garry, but Garry turns to ascend the platform for his entrance.

Garry looks around for something to do with the whisky, and gives it to Brooke.

Brookes peers at it, no idea what she's supposed to do with it.

She puts it down on the steps, right in

Flavia What?

Philip 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!

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.

Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms with a second, smaller, bunch of flowers. He takes his raincoat off.

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

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!-----

Roger Anyway, we can't stand here like this.

Frederick hands Lloyd the flowers to make ready for his entrance.

Vicki Like what? -----

Roger In your underwear.

Vicki OK, I'll take it off. -----

Roger In here, in here!

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.

Exit Roger into the bedroom.

Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms with Brooke, just in time for her to see Lloyd tearing Poppy's skirt off.

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.

*Garry stands half on and half off, waiting for Brooke. -----
At the sight of Brooke, Lloyd abandons Poppy, and instead urges Brooke upstairs*

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 I 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

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

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

----- *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 I 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

You weren't going to tell me a gentleman had come about the house, were you?

Mrs Clackett (*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... distraint...

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.

The copy for the programme of:

NOTHING ON

by

ROBIN HOUSEMONGER

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Weston-super-Mare

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Otstar Productions Ltd
present

DOTTY OTLEY
BELINDA BLAIR GARRY LEJEUNE

in

NOTHING ON

by

ROBIN HOUSEMONGER

with

SELSDON MOWBRAY
BROOKE ASHTON
FREDERICK FELLOWES

Directed by LLOYD DALLAS

Designed by GINA BOXHALL
Lighting by ROD WRAY
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by ROBIN HOUSEMONGER

Cast in order of appearance:

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

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

for OTSTAR PRODUCTIONS LTD

Company and Stage Manager	TIM ALLGOOD
Assistant Stage Manager	POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR

Production credits

Sardines by Old Salt Sardines. Antique silverware and cardboard boxes by Mrs J. G. H. Norton-Taylor. Stethoscope and hospital trolley by Severn Surgical Supplies. Straitjacket by Kumfy Restraints Ltd. Coffins by G. Ashforth and Sons.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of EUROPEAN BREWERIES in sponsoring this production.

'A Glimpse of the Noumenal'

(condensed from J G Stillwater: *Eros Untrousered - Studies in the Semantics of Bedroom Farce.*)

The cultural importance of the so-called 'bedroom farce,' or 'English sex farce,' has long been recognised, but attention has tended to centre on the metaphysical significance of mistaken identity and upon the social criticism implicit in the form's ground-breaking exploration of cross-dressing and trans-gender role-playing. The focus of scholarly interest, however, is now beginning to shift to the recurrence of certain mythic themes in the genre, and to their religious and spiritual implications.

[Illustration: a sardine]

Caption:

The common sardine. 13.4 million are eaten daily in Great Britain alone. The word is derived from the French, *sardine*.

In a typical bedroom farce, a man and a woman come to some secret or mysterious place (cf *Beauty and the Beast*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, etc) to perform certain acts which are supposed to remain concealed from the eyes of the world. This is plainly a variant of the traditional 'search' or 'quest', the goal of which, though presented as being 'sexual' in nature, is to be understood as a metaphor of enlightenment and transcendence. Some partial disrobing may occur, to suggest perhaps a preliminary stripping away of worldly illusions, but total nudity (perfect truth) and complete 'carnal knowledge' (ie spiritual understanding) are perpetually forestalled by the intervention of coincidental encounters (often with other seekers engaged in parallel 'quests'), which bear a striking resemblance to the trials undergone by postulants in various esoteric cults (cf *The Magic Flute*, *Star Wars*, etc).

According to evidence given to the Royal Commission on Procedures and Practice in the Sale of Real Estate, approximately 17% of estate agents admit to having on least one occasion passed off a property they were selling as their own.

In 63% of these cases the intention was to impress a member of the opposite sex, and/or to provide accomodation for illicit sexual activity - though some witnesses had at one time or another used properties to secure a loan or other business advantage from gullible victims. One agent boasted that he had managed to have intercourse in the master bedroom, then sell his partner the property - and help himself to a case of champagne from the cellar and a pound and a half of strawberries from the garden.

A recurring and highly significant feature of the genre is a multiplicity of doors. If we regard the world on this side of the doors as the physical one in which mortal men are condemned to live, then the world or worlds concealed behind them may be thought of as representing both the higher and more spiritual plane into which the postulants hope to escape, and the underworld from which at any moment demons may leap out to tempt or punish. When the doors do open, it is often with great suddenness and unexpectedness, highly suggestive of those epiphanic moments of insight and enlightenment which give access to the 'other', and offer us a fleeting glimpse of the noumenal.

Posset (milk curdled with ale or vinegar) was one of the first foods to be processed by industrial methods. In the sixteenth century virtually every village had its posset-mill, though few have survived. Their functioning was based on the common observation that milk tends to curdle more readily on thundery summer days. In a posset-mill production was maintained throughout the year by allowing the milk to run into a heated curdling chamber where the flow of incoming ale or vinegar was ingeniously harnessed to operate a kind of simple theatrical thundersheet. The product was then packed in small 'yoggy pots', made from the scrota of wild yogs.

- Janet Thrice: *The Tudor Food Industry*

Another recurring feature is the fall or loss of trousers. This can be readily recognised as an allusion to the Fall of Man and the loss of primal innocence. The removal of the trousers traditionally reveals a pair of striped underpants, in which we recognise both the stripes of the tiger, the feral beast that lurks in all of us beneath the civilised exterior suggested by the lost trousers, and perhaps also a premonitory representation of the stripes caused by the whipping which was formerly the traditional punishment for fornication.

[Illustration: Two pictures of Edward IV]

Caption:

An early pair of famous doubles - Edward IV and Leofric Leadbetter.

The confusion of identity caused by chance resemblance has always played a significant part in human affairs. Edward IV had a notorious lookalike, Leofric Leadbetter, a tallowboiler from Stony Stratford, who fooled many courtiers and visiting heads of state. Not even their wives could tell them apart. On one occasion Leadbetter gave the royal assent to three statutes and probably fathered the future King Edward V before the imposture was detected. Some historians believe that in the subsequent confusion it was in fact the king, not Leadbetter, who was hanged.

Farce, interestingly, is popularly categorised as 'funny'. It is true that the form often involves 'funny' elements in the sense of the strange or uncanny, such as supposedly supernatural phenomena, and behaviour suggestive of demonic possession. But the meaning of 'funny' here is probably also intended to include its secondary sense, 'provocative of laughter.'

[Illustration: several sardines]

Caption:

Sardines are even more plagued than their human cousins by the problem of doubles and lookalikes.

This is an interesting perception. It scarcely needs to be said that laughter, involving as it does the loss of self-control and the spasmodic release of breath, a vital bodily fluid, is a metaphorical representation of the sexual act. But it can also occasion the shedding of tears, which suggests that it may in addition be a sublimated form of mourning. Indeed we

recognise here a symbolic foretaste of death. If sneezing has been widely feared because it is thought that during a sneeze the soul flies out of the body, and may not be recaptured (whence 'Bless you!' or 'Gesundheit!'), then how much more dangerous is laughter. Not once but over and over again the repeated muscular contractions and expulsions of breath drive the 'soul' forth from the body. The danger of laughter is recognised in such expressions as 'killingly funny,' and 'I almost died.' There is a lurking fear that even more spectacular violence may ensue, and that a farce may end with a bloodletting as gruesome as in *Oedipus* or *Medea*, if people are induced to 'split their sides' or 'laugh their heads off.'

British citizens claiming for tax purposes to live abroad cannot spend more than six months in the country during a single tax year, or more than 91 days in any one tax year calculated over 4 years. In 1996 a helpline, TaxBreak, was set up to counsel visiting tax exiles suffering anxiety or guilt about their situation. Many of its clients report recurrent nightmares involving sudden chance encounters with officials of Inland Revenue.

Fear of the darker undertones of bedroom farce has sometimes in the past led to its dismissal as 'mere entertainment'. As the foregoing hopefully makes clear, though, financial support by the Arts Council or a private sponsor for the tour of a bedroom farce would be by no means out of place.

The first item of background information in a theatre programme is believe to have appeared in 1599, for a revival of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. It provided a brief history of the rise and fall of the North Italian city states, and an inset panel containing a list of useful Italian phrases for travellers.

Behind The Dressing Room Doors

DOTTY OTLEY (Mrs Clackett) makes a welcome return to the stage to create the role of Mrs Clackett after playing Mrs Hackett, Britain's most famous lollipop lady ('Ooh, I can't 'ardly 'old me lolly up!') in over 320 episodes of TV's ON THE ZEBRAS. Her many stage appearances include her critically acclaimed portrayal of Fru Säckett, the comic char in Strindberg's SCENES FROM THE CHARNELHOUSE. Her first appearance ever? In a school production of HENRY IV PART I - as the old bag-lady, Mrs Duckett.

BELINDA BLAIR (Flavia Brent) has been on the stage since the age of four, when she made her debut in SINBAD THE SAILOR at the old Croydon Hippodrome as one of Miss Toni Tanner's Ten Tapping Tots. She subsequently danced her way round this country, Southern Africa, and the Far East in shows like ZIPPEDY-DOODA! and HERE COME LES GIRLS! More recently she has been seen in such comedy hits as DON'T MR. DUDDLE!, WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING IN MY BED?, and TWICE TWO IS SEX. She is married to scriptwriter Terry Wough, who has contributed lead-in material to most of TV's chat shows. They have two sons and three retrievers.

Dignity is the straitjacket of the soul. Its loss is our first stumbling step towards sanity. - Friedrich Nietzsche

GARRY LEJEUNE (Roger Tramplemain) while still at drama school won the coveted Laetitia Daintyman Medal for Violence. His television work includes POLICE!, CRIME SQUAD, SWAT, FORENSIC, and THE NICK, but he is probably best-known as 'Cornetto', the ice-cream salesman who stirs the hearts of all the lollipop ladies in ON THE ZEBRAS.

SELSDON MOWBRAY (Burglar) first 'trod the boards' at the age of 12 - playing Lucius in a touring production of JULIUS CAESAR, with his father, the great Chelmsford Mowbray, in the lead. Since then he has served in various local reps, and claims to have appeared with every company to have toured Shakespeare in the past half-century, working his way up through the Mustardseeds and the various Boys and Sons of, to the Balthazars, Benvolios, and Le Beaus; then the Slenders, Lennoxes, Trinculos, Snouts, and Froths; and graduating to the Scroops, Poloniuses, and Aguecheeks. His most recent film appearance was as Outraged Pensioner in GREEN WILLIES.

The most important technological advance in history, so far as the maintenance of moral standards is concerned, was the invention of the keyhole. - George Santayana

BROOKE ASHTON (Vicki) is probably best known as the girl wearing nothing but 'good, honest, natural froth' in the Hauptbahnhofbrau lager commercial. Her television appearances range from Girl at Infants' School in ON THE ZEBRAS to Girl in Massage Parlour in ON PROBATION. Cinemagoers saw her in THE GIRL IN ROOM 14, where she played the Girl in Room 312.

FREDERICK FELLOWES (Philip Brent) has appeared in many popular television series, including CALLING CASUALTY, CARDIAC ARREST!, OUT-PATIENTS, and IN-PATIENTS. On stage he was most recently seen in the controversial all-male version of THE TROJAN WOMEN. He is happily married, and lives near Crawley, where his wife

breeds pedigree dogs. 'If she ever leaves me,' he says, 'it will probably be for an Irish wolfhound!'

NIMBLE	What have we here? A breechless worthy? A justice of the peace ungaskinned quite? And with his once so high disdainful nose trapped fast in Mistress Drawstring's underlinen?
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JUSTICE PUCKERMOUTH	I can explain all this.
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- Beaumont and Fletcher (attrib): <i>He Would If He Could</i>
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ROBIN HOUSEMONGER (Author) was born in Worcester Park, Surrey, into a family 'unremarkable in every way except for an aunt with red hair who used to sing all the high twiddly bits from THE MERRY WIDOW over the tea-table.' He claims to have been the world's most unsuccessful gents hosiery wholesaler, and began writing 'to fill the long hours between one hosiery order and the next.' He turned this experience into his very first play, SOCKS BEFORE MARRIAGE, which ran in the West End for nine years. Two of his subsequent plays, BRIEFS ENCOUNTER and HANKY PANKY, broke box office records in Perth, Western Australia. NOTHING ON is his seventeenth play.

LLOYD DALLAS (Director) 'read English at Cambridge, and stagecraft at the local benefits office.' He has directed plays in most parts of Britain, winning the South of Scotland Critics' Circle Special Award in 1969. In 1972 he directed a highly successful season for the National Theatre of Sri Lanka. In recent years he has probably become best known for his brilliant series of 'Shakespeare in Summer' productions in the parks of the inner London boroughs.

Desperation tells a thousand tales - and each of those thousand begets a thousand more. - Moldovian proverb
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