Act One

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

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

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 Housemonger's 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 darkness of the auditorium.

Lloyd You leave the sardines and you put the receiver back.

Dotty Oh yes, I put the receiver back.

She puts the receiver back and moves off again with the sardines.

Lloyd And you leave the sardines.

Dotty And I leave the sardines?

Lloyd You leave the sardines.

Dotty I put the receiver back and I leave the sardines.

Lloyd Right.

Dotty We’ve changed that, have we, love?

Lloyd No, love.

Dotty That’s what I’ve always been doing?

Lloyd I shouldn’t say that, Dotty, my precious.

Dotty How about the words, love? Am I getting some of them right?

Lloyd Some of them have a very familiar ring.

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.

She replaces the receiver.

Always the same, isn’t it. Put your feet up for two minutes and immediately they come running after you.

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.

Lloyd  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.

Lloyd  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.

Roger  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.

Roger  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?


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!


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.

Executi 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.

Executi 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 Roger’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.

Garry (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 (sits) 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.

**Lloyd**  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.

Lloyd 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.

Lloyd (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.

Lloyd  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!

Brook  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

Tim  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 girlfriend, are you?

Poppy  gives him a startled look.

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

Enter Selsdon from the study.

Selsdon  Not here?

Lloyd  Yes, yes, there!

Belinda  Sit down, my precious.

Dotty  Go back to sleep.

Lloyd  You’re not on for another twenty pages yet.

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

Lloyd  And on we go.

He goes back down into the auditorium.

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

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

Belinda  (to Lloyd, with lowered voice) Aren’t they sweet?

Lloyd  What?

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

Lloyd  Garry and Dotty?

Belinda  Sh!
**Lloyd (lowers his voice)** What? You mean they’re an item? Those two? Tramplemain and Mrs Clackett?

**Belinda** It’s supposed to be a secret.

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

**Belinda** Sh! Didn’t you know?

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

*Enter Garry from the bedroom.*

**Garry** What’s happening?

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

*Exit Belinda through the front door.*

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

*Enter Dotty from the service quarters, inquiringly.*

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

**Garry** What?

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

*Exit Dotty to the service quarters.*

*Enter Brooke from the bedroom.*

**Lloyd** ‘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 Roger’s.

Philip  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.

Frederick  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.

Selsdon  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.

Lloyd  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 comes up on stage.

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.

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

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

**Lloyd**  Oh. *(Pause.)* Freddie!

*Enter Frederick, still wounded, from the study.*

**Lloyd**  I think the point is that you've had a great fright when she mentions income tax, and you feel very insecure and exposed, and you want something familiar to hold on to.
Frederick (with humble gratitude) Thank you, Lloyd. (He clutches the groceries to his chest.) That's most helpful.

Exit Frederick into the study.

Belinda (to Lloyd) Bless you, my sweet.

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

Exit Belinda into the mezzanine bathroom.

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

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

Roger Yes, but I could hear voices!

Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.

Vicki Voices? What sort of voices?

Roger People's voices.

Vicki But there's no one here.

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.

Mrs Clackett 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 pillowcases. 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 (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.

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?

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.

Knocking!

Knocking.

Upstairs!

He runs upstairs. Knocking.

Oh my God, there’s something in the airing cupboard!
He unlocks it and opens it. Enter Vicki.

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  But, darling, why did you lock the door?

Vicki  Why did I lock the door? Why did you lock the door!

Roger  I didn't lock the door!

Vicki  Someone 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 realising 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.

Lloyd  Right, then. On we bloodily stagger.

Frederick has to reach for a chair again.
Lloyd  Oh, sorry, Freddie. Let me rephrase that. On we blindly stumble. Brooke, I withdraw that.

Exit Belinda along the upstairs corridor, Frederick into study.

Lloyd  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.


Exit Selsdon through the front door.

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

Roger  In here, in here!

He ushers her into the bedroom.

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

Philip  Darling, this glue. Is it the sort you can never get unstuck...? Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.

Exit Philip into the study with the tax demand, envelope, glue and one of the plates of sardines from the telephone table.

Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the hot water bottle. He looks up and down the landing.

Enter Vicki from the bedroom.

Vicki  Now what?

Roger  A hot-water bottle! I didn't put it there!

Vicki  I 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.*

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

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom.*

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.

Roger  You – wait here.

Vicki (*uneasily*)  You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.

Roger  Yes, but this one has been extensively modernised 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 . . .

She freezes at the sight of the flight bag.

Roger  I put them there. Or was it there?

Vicki  Bag . . .

Vicki runs down the stairs to Roger, who is directly underneath the gallery.

Roger  I suppose Mrs Sprockett must have taken them away again . . . What? What is it?

Vicki  Bag!

Roger  Bag?

Vicki  Bag! Bag!

Vicki drags Roger silently back towards the stairs.

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.

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.

Roger  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!

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 modernisation.

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.*

Lloyd  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.*

Lloyd (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.

He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa.


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... 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.

Exit Burglar into the study.

Enter Roger from the service quarters, followed by Mrs Clackett, who is holding another plate of sardines.

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 dematerialised 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.
Mrs Clackett  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 bedroom.

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!

Exit Roger into the linen cupboard.

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, 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!

Enter Roger from the bedroom, still holding the sardines.

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.

Vicki 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.

Flavia Do you remember this china tea service –

Vicki screams, off.
Flavia — that you gave me on the very first anniversary of our . . . ?

Enter Vicki from the downstairs bathroom. She stops at the sight of Flavia.

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.

Philip (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.

Philip 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!

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.

Roger 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 Sheik’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? 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!

**Tim**, wearing the sheet as Philip’s double, gets to his feet and gazes blearily at **Lloyd**.

**Tim** Sorry?

**Lloyd** Oh, yes. You’re acting.

**Tim** I must have dropped off down there.

**Lloyd** Never mind, Tim.

**Tim** Do something?

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

**Frederick** hesitates.

**Lloyd** Some other problem, Freddie?
Frederick  Well, since we’re stopped anyway.
Lloyd    Why did I ask?
Frederick I mean, you know how stupid I am about plot.
Lloyd    I know, Freddie.
Frederick May I ask another silly question?
Lloyd    All my studies in world drama lie at your disposal.
Frederick I still don’t understand why the Sheikh just happens to be Philip’s double.
Garry    Because he comes in and we all think he’s, you know, and we all, I mean, that’s the joke.
Frederick I see that.
Belinda  My sweet, the rest of the plot depends on it!
Frederick I see that. But it is rather a coincidence, isn’t it?
Lloyd    It is rather a coincidence, Freddie, yes. Until you reflect that there was an earlier draft of the play, now unfortunately lost to us. And in this the author makes it clear that Philip’s father as a young man had travelled extensively in the Middle East.
Frederick I see . . . I see!
Lloyd    You see?
Frederick That’s very interesting.
Lloyd    I thought you’d like that.
Frederick But will the audience get it?
Lloyd    You must tell them, Freddie. Looks. Gestures. That’s what acting’s all about. OK?
Frederick Yes. Thank you, Lloyd. Thank you.
Lloyd    And it will be even more powerful when you do it with no trousers,
Frederick  Of course. *(Takes his trousers off.)*

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

Lloyd  returns to the stalls.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flavia</th>
<th>You toss me aside like a broken china doll! <em>(She hits him.)</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheikh</td>
<td>What? What? What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglar</td>
<td>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.</td>
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*Pause.*

Lloyd  Brooke!

Brooke  Sorry . . .

Lloyd  Your line. Come on, love, we’re two lines away from the end of the act.

Brooke  I don’t understand.

Lloyd  Give her the line!

Poppy *(off)*  ‘What’s that, Dad?’

Brooke  Yes, but I don’t understand.

Belinda  It’s ‘What’s that, Dad?’

Selsdon  Yes, I say to you, ‘I’ll tell you one thing, Vicki’ and you say to me, ‘What’s that, Dad?’

Brooke  I don’t understand why the Sheikh looks like Philip.
Silence. Everyone waits for the storm. **Lloyd** comes slowly up on stage.

**Lloyd** Poppy! Bring the book!

*Enter Poppy from the wings, with the book.*

**Lloyd** *(patiently)* Is that the line, Poppy? ‘I don’t understand why the Sheikh looks like Philip?’ Can we consult the author’s text and make absolutely sure?

**Poppy** Well, I think it’s . . .

**Lloyd** *(with exquisite politeness)* ‘What’s that, Dad?’ Right. That’s the line, Brooke, love. We all know you’ve worked in very classy places up in London where they let you make the play up as you go along, but we don’t want that kind of thing here, do we. Not when the author has provided us with such a considered and polished line of his own. Not at one o’clock in the morning. Not two lines away from the end of Act One. Not when we’re just about to get a tea break before we all drop dead of exhaustion. We merely want to hear the line. *(Suddenly puts his mouth next to Brooke’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.

**Lloyd** Exit? Does it say ‘exit’?

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

**Lloyd** 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:

Dotty  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  (with a murderous look at Lloyd)  What's that, Dad?

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 . . .

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 Two

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

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

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 round. 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 seven thirty?

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.*

**Poppy** 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.*
Poppy  No?

Frederick  No.

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

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

Belinda  He’s hiding them on stage now.

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

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

Belinda  Oh, my poor sweet!

Frederick  I thought I’d better leave him to it. I don’t want to make things worse. He’s all right, is he?

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

Frederick  I mean, he’s going on?

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

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

Tim  This is getting farcical.

Belinda  Money.

Tim  Money?

Belinda  You’re waving money around.

Tim  Oh, that’s for . . . Oh . . . !

Tim hurriedly grabs his raincoat from a peg and exits into the dressing-rooms.
Frederick  She's a funny woman, you know – Dotty. So up and down. She was perfectly all right last night.

Belinda  Last night?

Frederick  Yes, she took me for a drink after the show in some club she knows about.

Belinda  She was with _you_? You were with _her_?

Frederick  She was being very sympathetic about all my troubles.

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

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

Enter Poppy.

Poppy  And another thing.

Belinda  Nothing else, my sweet!

Poppy  Where's Selsdon?

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

Poppy  He's not in his dressing-room.

Belinda  Oh – I might have guessed!

Poppy  Oh – the front-of-house calls!

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

Frederick  What shall I do?

Belinda (_firmly_)  Absolutely nothing at all.

Frederick  Right.

Belinda  You've done quite enough already, my pet.
Exit Belinda to the dressing-rooms.  

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

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

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

Poppy Selsdon wants to kill someone?

Tim Garry, Garry... Selsdon?

Poppy We’ve lost him.

Tim Oh, not again!

Poppy Flowers!

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

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

Tim Oh... Well...

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

Frederick Very charming.

She kisses Tim.

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

Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms.

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

Frederick Oh, I think Poppy’s done them.

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

Frederick Oh dear, I think she said three minutes.

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

Frederick I think so.

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

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

Frederick Any luck?

Belinda No, but I found yet another bottle.

Frederick Oh dear.

Tim Oh . . .

Belinda Hidden in the ladies’ lavatory, would you believe.

Frederick Oh, my Lord!

Tim (takes it) Oxfam! I’ll give it to Oxfam!

Poppy runs in from the dressing-rooms.

Poppy He’s not in the pub . . .

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

Tim I’d better get the spare gear on.

Exit Tim to the dressing-rooms with the whisky.

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

Frederick Oh dear – Tim’s already told them two minutes.
Poppy  He’s done two minutes? (Into the microphone.) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in one minute.

Enter Lloyd through the pass door.

Lloyd  What the fuck is going on?

Belinda  Lloyd!

Frederick  Great Scott!

Poppy  I didn’t know you were here!

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

Belinda  My sweet, we’re having great dramas downstairs!

Lloyd  We’re having great dramas out there! (To Poppy.) This is the matinée, 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.

Belinda  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 realises 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!


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 matinée.

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

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

Poppy  Right. Quiet, then, please . . .
Frederick  Let me just say one more word... Hold it a moment, Poppy...

Selsdon  Let me just say one word. Sardines!

Belinda  Sardines!

Frederick  Sardines!

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

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

Enter Lloyd through the pass door.

Lloyd  Now what?

Tim  We're just going up.

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

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

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

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

Lloyd  Anybody else have thoughts they feel they must communicate?

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

Lloyd  What?

Poppy  I mean, you know, later...

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

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

yes...

Lloyd  And you didn't buy any flowers for me?
Tim  No... well... no...

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

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

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

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

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

Exit Lloyd through the pass door. Poppy sobs.

Frederick  Oh dear.

Belinda  Don't cry, Poppy, love

Selsdon  Just get the old bus on the road.

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

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

Poppy  Quiet backstage!

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

Belinda  Hush, love.

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

The introductory music for Nothing On.

Tabs going up...

[Note: the act that follows is a somewhat condensed version of the one we saw rehearsed.]
Dotty makes her entrance.

There is a sound of scattered applause.

A small laugh.

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.

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.

As the curtain rises the telephone is ringing.

— Enter from the service quarters Mrs Clackett, carrying a plate of sardines.

Mrs Clackett It’s no good you going on . . .

— 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.

— 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
Belinda hurries across to draw Frederick 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.

--- 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.

As Garry turns back to collect the flight bag he gets a fleeting glimpse of this.

As Garry comes through the service quarters he takes another look.

He stamps on Frederick's foot and re-enters.

Frederick struggles with damaged foot and bleeding nose. Dotty gets down on her knees to examine the foot.

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.

Roger 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.

Roger Hello? Anyone at home?

—— Closes the door.

No, there's no one here. So what do you think?

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 ...
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.

Belinda tries to explain to Frederick that Dotty has taken a fancy to him. Frederick can’t understand a word of it.

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

... push the bathroom door open.

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. 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.

Belinda suddenly points out that 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.

Belinda in the direction of the dressing-rooms in pursuit of Selsdon.

The bathroom door opens.

Do one or two odd jobs .

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. Only now I've lost the newspaper.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, carrying the sardines.

Roger I'm sorry about this.
Frederick is very agitated by this. He takes the sardines away from Dotty, pats her on the shoulder, gives her a handkerchief, realises that it’s not in a state to be seen, puts it hurriedly away, pushes the sardines back into her hand and edges her towards the door.

At the last moment Dotty realises she hasn’t got the newspaper:

Frederick runs and fetches it from the props table. Dotty realises that she is still holding the sardines, and lashes them to Frederick just in time...

... to make her entrance.

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.
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.

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.

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.

Vicki: So which way?

Roger: (picking up the bags) All right. Before she comes back with the sardines.

Vicki: Up here?

Roger: Yes, yes.
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.

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 Brooke.

Garry hurls the sheet at Frederick and Dotty. He goes back on stage.

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.

——- 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.
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 ... 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 —

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.

— Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Roger'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!
kneels - weeps - hangs on to her plate of sardines.

Dotty breaks away from Garry and goes to makes 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.

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

She puts it down on the steps, right in front of Selsdon, in order to undress for her entrance. While her back is turned
Selsdon snatches it up and conceals it.

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!

Mrs Clackett I thought you was in Spain!

Philip We are! We are!
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-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.

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?

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.
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.

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.

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!

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
Brooke makes her exit.

Belinda tries to demonstrate to Brooke that she is going to look for Selsdon, then runs back to remind her.

...to open the linen cupboard door.

Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms with a second, smaller, bunch of flowers. He takes his raincoat off. Belinda gestures hastily to Tim in passing to explain the situation and exits to the dressing-rooms.

Tim asks Frederick where she is going.

Frederick demonstrates raising the elbow.

Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms. She demonstrates that Selsdon has locked himself in somewhere.

there. It’s like a Sunday school outing.

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

Mrs Clackett 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 pillowcases. 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.
Frederick 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.

Roger I thought I heard voices.

Mrs Clackett Voices? There’s no voices here, love.

Roger I must have imagined it.

— 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.
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, steps 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 arms round Garry.

Poppy urges Belinda upstairs for her entrance.

Belinda flees up to the platform and opens the door to make her entrance.

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 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 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.

— She is holding 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.

— 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.
... 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 realises that there is ...

... no knocking — because Brooke is still off.

Garry on stage repeats the line.

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.

--- 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.

--- 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 sheets and towels in.
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!

Why did I lock the door? Why 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.

Poppy [reading] Someone locked the door!

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

Poppy [reading] Like what?

OK, I’ll take it off.

Lloyd shoves the flowers into Dotty’s hands to get rid of them, and indicates to the terrified Poppy that she is to go on for Brooke.

here... I can’t just stand here and, you know, indefinitely...

Roger But, darling, why did you lock the door?

Roger I didn’t lock the door!

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

Roger In your underwear.

Roger In here, in here!

Exit Roger into the bedroom.

Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope, and a tube of glue.
Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms with Brooke, just in time for her to see Lloyd tearing Poppy’s skirt off.

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

Philip Darling, this glue. Is it the sort that you can never get unstuck . . .? Oh, Mrs Clackett’s made us some sardines.

Exit Philip into the study with the tax demand, envelope, glue and one of the plates of sardines from the telephone table.

—— Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the hot-water bottle. He looks up and down the landing.

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.
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?'

Poppy desperately turns over the pages of the book to find the new place, while Garry and everyone else look 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 with surprise, claps a hand over his mouth, then realises that he was supposed to roar anyway.

Vicki Why did I lock the door? Why did you lock the door!

— Roger (off) Don't panic!

Enter Roger, and goes downstairs.

There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this. I'll fetch Mrs Splotchet 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.
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 with only one. He hands this to Lloyd, who hands it to Brooke. She peers at it as it keels sadly over, then hurl's it on to the floor and runs out to the dressing-rooms.

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
picks it up, and **Lloyd** snatches it out of his hand.

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.

--- **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
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 push him aside and face up to each other. Dotty grabs the axe from Garry to use on Belinda. But they are distracted because...

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.

He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa.


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...

— He opens the front door to get a prompt.

Selsdon appears at the front door.

Selsdon Yes? Yes? 'They all say the same thing...?'

Poppy runs back with the flowers to the corner to give him his prompt.

Poppy 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

Selsdon Hard to what?

Omnes (shouting) 'Adjust to retirement!'

Selsdon goes back on.

Selsdon makes his exit.

— It's hard to assess a requirement...

— Exit Burglar into the study.
Dotty is about to resume her attack upon Belinda when she realises that Garry is already making his entrance.

Dotty hands the axe panic-stricken to Belinda and makes her own entrance.

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.

Roger . . . And the prospective tenant naturally wishes to know if there is any previous history of paranormal phenomena.

Mrs Clackett Enter Roger from the service quarters.

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

Roger I mean, has anything ever dematerialised 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.
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.

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.

Roger I'd better warm 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!
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 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 fire point, 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.

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.

Mrs Clackett 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 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.

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.

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 bedroom.

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!

— 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
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.

Dotty demonstrates to Belinda and Lloyd what she did, half delighted and half shocked at herself.

Everyone tries to see what’s happening on stage, also half delighted and half shocked.

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.

Philip (aside) The Inland Revenue!

Roger (sees Philip, frightened) He’s back!

Philip  I must go.

Roger  Stay!

Philip  I won’t, thank you.
Selsdon finds the bottle on the platform—yet another bottle!

Lloyd takes the whisky away from Selsdon mechanically.

Lloyd, Dotty, and Belinda all take swigs from it in turns, absent-mindedly, as they follow events on stage.

Dotty holds up her hand to get attention to the events on stage. She demonstrates that Garry is going to have to run downstairs.

They all wait for the crash.

The sound of Garry falling downstairs.

Even Selsdon can hear it.

No sound from the stage. Everyone listens and as they listen the laughter dies away.

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 falls downstairs.
Frederick, on stage, improvises a line.

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.

Philip Are you all right?

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!
Garry appears, still hobbled, in the study doorway, and furiously repeats the cue yet again.

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 on stage.

— 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) 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!
Garry comes hobbling and raging off, his shoes still tied together. He gazes in amazement at the sight of Dotty and Selsdon.

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.

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.

— 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.

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 any case . . .

Frederick has to make his entrance.

Garry tries to get Brooke to untie him.

But Brooke blindly has to make 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.

Brooke runs towards the bedrooms then stops. Belinda watches this anxiously.

Lloyd hands the cactus to Dotty without looking at it while he searches.

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.

Vicki There's someone in the bathroom now!

— 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.
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.

Vicki exits hurriedly into the downstairs bathroom.

Flavia Do you remember this china tea service –

— Vicki screams, off.

Flavia – that you gave me on the very first anniversary of our . . .?

Enter Vicki from the downstairs bathroom. She stops at the sight of Flavia.

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.

Philip (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!

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

Philip 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.
Garry makes his exit and also watches the scene below in amazement. So does Belinda.

---

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.
Lloyd lowers his trousers again for Dotty to resume operations.

Garry makes his exit and Lloyd hurriedly decides that he needs no further attention.

Roger I've found your dress! It came flying out of the attic at me!

Enter Roger along the upstairs corridor, holding Vicki's dress.

— 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.
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.

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.

—— Philip attempts to enter
from the bedroom.

Selsdon makes his exit.
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
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.

— 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
going 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,
Belinda takes the cactus away from Selsdon, then hurriedly hands it down to Lloyd so that...

...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.

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, 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.

Roger But in here...

Flavia Arab sheets?
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.

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.

Exit Philip discreetly into the study.

Burglar It's my little girl! So far as I could see before she went.

Vicki Dad!

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!

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

--- Enter through the front door a Sheikh, 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!

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?
Poppy (screams to Lloyd in despair) I’m going to have a . . .

Selsdon flings the front door open.

Selsdon Good old-fashioned plate of ichtat . . . ?

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.

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 Three

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 that 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** and **Poppy** (*together*)  . . . co-operation and understanding.

**Tim**  I sincerely trust . . .

*He pauses for an instant to see if he will be interrupted again.*

*He becomes aware of the whisky bottle.*

. . . no other hiccups. No other hold-ups. 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 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 only 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.

Roger 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.
Roger  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.


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.

Roger  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.

Roger  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 right. 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 Roger's.

The bedroom door shuts in Roger's face. He opens the door again and exits into the bedroom with the bag and box.

Philip ... 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  * (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.*

Flavia  . . . 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.

Mrs Clackett 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 door handles.

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 off-stage 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.
Philip/Tim 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, you know, 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! *I didn’t put it there!*

**Vicki**    *I 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.*

**Flavia**    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.

Roger You—wait here.

Vicki (uneasily) You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.

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

Vicki What? What is it?

Roger looks round.

Vicki 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.
Roger  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 realises that the sardines are not there.

Vicki  Bag . . .

Roger goes back downstairs to investigate. Vicki runs after him.

Flavia, unseen by Roger, 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.

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 in 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.

Roger  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 various 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 I'll 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 Three 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.