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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Noises Off

by Michael Frayn

SAMUEL FRENCH

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Noises Off

BY

Michael Frayn

was first presented, by arrangement with Michael Codron,
at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith,
on 23 February 1982,
and on 31 March 1982 by Michael Codron
at the Savoy Theatre, London.

The Cast:

Dotty Otley	Patricia Routledge
Lloyd Dallas	Paul Eddington
Garry Lejeune	Nicky Henson
Brooke Ashton	Rowena Roberts
Poppy Norton-Taylor	Yvonne Antrobus
Frederick Fellowes	Tony Mathews
Belinda Blair	Jan Waters
Tim Allgood	Roger Lloyd Pack
Selsdon Mowbray	Michael Aldridge
Electrician	Ray Edwards

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

Noises Off

BY

Michael Frayn

opened on Broadway at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre,
presented by James M. Nederlander, Robert Fryer,
Jerome Minskoff, The Kennedy Center, and
Michael Codron in association with
Jonathan Farkas and MTM Enterprises, Inc.,
on December 11, 1983.

The Cast:

Dotty Otley	Dorothy Loudon
Lloyd Dallas	Brian Murray
Garry Lejeune	Victor Garber
Brooke Ashton	Deborah Rush
Poppy Norton-Taylor	Amy Wright
Frederick Fellowes	Paxton Whitehead
Belinda Blair	Linda Thorson
Tim Allgood	Jim Piddock
Selsdon Mowbray	Douglas Seale

Directed by Michael Blakemore

Settings and Costumes Designed by Michael Annals

Lighting Designed by Martin Aronstein

Casting by Howard Feuer and Jeremy Ritzer

Production Stage Manager - Susie Cordon

Stage Manager – Laura deBuys

Noises Off

BY

Michael Frayn

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

The Cast:

Dotty Otley	Patricia Hodge
Lloyd Dallas	Peter Egan
Garry Lejeune	Aden Gillett
Brooke Ashton	Natalie Walter
Poppy Norton-Taylor	Selina Griffiths
Frederick Fellowes	Jeff Rawle
Belinda Blair	Susie Blake
Tim Allgood	Paul Thornley
Selsdon Mowbray	Christopher Benjamin

Directed by Jeremy Sams

Designed by Robert Jones
Lighting by Tim Mitchell
Sound by Fergus O'Hare *for Aura*



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

Dotty Otley	Lynn Redgrave
Garry Lejeune	Stephen Mangan

THE ROYAL NATIONAL THEATRE PRODUCTION OF

Noises Off

BY

Michael Frayn

opened again on Broadway at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre,
presented by
Ambassador Theatre Group and Act Productions,
Waxman Williams Entertainment, D. Harris/M. Swinsky,
USA Ostar Theatricals and Nederlander Presentations,
on November 1, 2001.

The Cast:

Dotty Otley	Patti Lupone
Lloyd Dallas	Peter Gallagher
Garry Lejeune	Thomas McCarthy
Brooke Ashton	Katie Finneran
Poppy Norton-Taylor	Robin Weigert
Frederick Fellowes	Faith Prince
Belinda Blair	Edward Hibbert
Tim Allgood	T.R. Knight
Selsdon Mowbray	Richard Easton

Directed by Jeremy Sams

Sets and Costumes by Robert Jones

Lighting by Tim Mitchell *Sound by* Fergus O'Hare *for Aura*

Casting by Jim Carnahan *Technical Supervision* by Unitech

Production Stage Manager - David O'Brien

Press Representative - Barlow-Hartman *Marketing* - TMG

General Management - 101 Productions, Ltd.

Associate Producers

Pre-Eminence Incidental Colman Tod Curtis/Johnson

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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

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

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

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

Reading the English text that has been in use in the past decade and a half I have discovered a series of bizarre misprints, and I suspect that directors have been driven to some quite outlandish devices to make sense of them. What's happened to it in other languages I can for the most part only guess. I know that in France it has been played under two different titles (sometimes simultaneously), and in Germany under four. I imagine that it's often been freely adapted to local circumstances, in spite of the prohibitions in the contract. In France, certainly, my British actors and the characters they are playing turned into Frenchmen, in Italy into Italians (who introduced a 'Sardine Song' between the acts). In Barcelona they

were Catalan-speaking actors playing Spanish-speaking characters; in Tampere, in northern Finland, they were robust northerners speaking the Tampere dialect and playing effete southerners with Helsinki accents. On the Japanese poster they all appear to be Japanese; on the Chinese poster Chinese. In Prague they performed the play for some ten years without Act Three, and no one noticed until I arrived.

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

SETTING

Act I

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

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

Act II

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

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

Act III

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

(Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees.
Saturday, April 6.)



The cast of ***Noises Off*** is performing a play called **Nothing On.**
Sample pages for the program for **Nothing On** at The Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare, are provided on pages 173 – 181.

ACT I

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

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

The accommodation comprises: an open-plan living area, with a staircase leading to a gallery. A notable feature is the extensive range of entrances and exits provided. On the ground floor the front door gives access to the mature garden and delightful village beyond. Another door leads to the elegant paneled 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.)* And, Brooke...

BROOKE. Yes?

LLOYD. Are you in?

BROOKE. In?

LLOYD. Are you there?

BROOKE. What?

LLOYD. You're out. OK. I'll call again. And on we go. *(Exit BROOKE through the front door.)* So there you are, holding the receiver.

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

MRS. CLACKETT. Always the same story, isn't it...

LLOYD. And you take the newspaper.

(She comes back, and picks up the newspaper and the receiver.)

DOTTY. I leave the sardines, I take the newspaper.

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

DOTTY. And off at last I go.

LLOYD. Leaving the receiver.

(She replaces the receiver and goes off into the study. Enter ROGER as before, with the cardboard box.)

ROGER. ... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off. *(Enter VICKI as before.)* So we've got the place entirely to ourselves. *(ROGER goes back and brings in a flight bag, and closes the front door.)* I'll just check. *(He opens the door to the service quarters. VICKI gazes round.)* Hello? Anyone at home? *(Closes the door.)* No, there's no one here. So what do you think?

VICKI. Great. And this is all yours?

ROGER. Just a little shack in the woods, really. Converted posset mill. Sixteenth-century.

VICKI. It must have cost a bomb.

ROGER. Well, one has to have somewhere to entertain one's business associates. Someone coming at four o'clock, in fact. Arab sheikh. Oil. You know.

VICKI. Right. And I've got to get those files to our Basingstoke office by four.

ROGER. Yes, we'll only just manage to fit it in. I mean, we'll

only just do it. I mean...

VICKI. Right, then.

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

VICKI. All these doors!

ROGER. Oh, only a handful, really. *(He opens the various doors one after another to demonstrate.)* Study... Kitchen.. And a self-contained service flat for the housekeeper.

VICKI. Terrific. And which one's the ... ?

ROGER. What?

VICKI. You know ...

ROGER. The usual offices? Through here.

(He opens the downstairs bathroom door for her.)

VICKI. Fantastic.

(Exit VICKI into the bathroom. Enter MRS. CLACKETT from the study, without the newspaper.)

MRS. CLACKETT. Now I've lost the sardines ...

(Mutual surprise. ROGER closes the door to the bathroom, and slips the champagne back into the bag.)

ROGER. I'm sorry. I thought there was no one here.

MRS. CLACKETT. I'm not here. I'm off, only it's the royal you know, where they wear those hats, and they're all covered in fruit, and who are you?

ROGER. I'm from the agents.

MRS. CLACKETT. From the agents?

ROGER. Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

MRS. CLACKETT. Oh. Which one are you, then? Squire, Squire, Hackham, or Dudley?

ROGER. I'm Tramplemain.

MRS. CLACKETT. Walking in here as if you owned the place! I thought you was a burglar.

ROGER. No, I just dropped in to ... go into a few things... *(The bathroom door opens. ROGER closes it.)* Well, to check some of the measurements... *(The bathroom door opens. ROGER closes it.)* Do one or two odd jobs... *(The bathroom door opens. ROGER closes it.)* Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective tenant over the house.

(The bathroom door opens.)

VICKI. What's wrong with this door?

(ROGER closes it.)

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

(Enter VICKI from bathroom.)

VICKI. That's not the bedroom.

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

MRS. CLACKETT. Clackett, dear, Clackett.

VICKI. Oh. Hi.

ROGER. She's not really here.

MRS. CLACKETT. Only it's the royal, you know, with the hats.

ROGER. *(To MRS. CLACKETT.)* Don't worry about us.

MRS. CLACKETT. *(Picks up the sardines.)* I'll have the sound on low.

ROGER. We'll just inspect the house.

MRS. CLACKETT. Only now I've lost the newspaper.

(Exit MRS. CLACKETT into the study, carrying the sardines. Only she leaves them behind.)

LLOYD. Sardines!

ROGER. I'm sorry about this.

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

LLOYD. Sardines!

(Enter DOTTY from the study.)

DOTTY. I've forgotten the sardines.

GARRY. Lloyd! These sardines! They're driving us all mad!

LLOYD. Something wrong with the sardines? Poppy!

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

BROOKE. *(Elsewhere again.)* Sorry?

GARRY. The sardines.

BROOKE. What sardines?

(Enter POPPY, the assistant stage manager, from the wings.)

POPPY. Change the sardines?

LLOYD. Make it four grilled turbot. Off the bone.

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

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

GARRY. I'm just trying to, you know.

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

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

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

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

POPPY. Um. Well.

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

POPPY. Yes?

LLOYD. Don't let this happen again.

POPPY. Oh. No.

(Exit POPPY into the wings.)

GARRY. Sorry, Lloyd. I just thought we ought to, do you know

what I mean?

LLOYD. Of course.

GARRY. Better out than, you know.

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

DOTTY. Absolutely happy, Lloyd, my love.

(She goes to the study door.)

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

DOTTY. Anything, Lloyd, my sweet.

LLOYD. Take the sardines off with you.

(Exit MRS. CLACKETT into study, carrying the sardines.)

ROGER. I'm sorry about this.

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

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

VICKI. Great. Come on, then. *(She starts upstairs.)* I've got to be in Basingstoke by four.

ROGER. Perhaps we should just have a glass of champagne.

VICKI. We'll take it up with us.

ROGER. Yes. Well ...

VICKI. And don't let my files out of sight.

ROGER. No. Only ...

VICKI. What?

ROGER. Well ...

VICKI. Her?

ROGER. She *has* been in the family for generations.

(Enter MRS. CLACKETT from the study, with the newspaper but without the sardines.)

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

VICKI. Oh. Great.

MRS. CLACKETT. *(To ROGER.)* Won't she, love?

ROGER. Yes. Well. Yes!

MRS. CLACKETT. *(To VICKI.)* And we'll enjoy having you. *(To ROGER.)* Won't we, love?

ROGER. Oh. Well.

VICKI. Terrific.

MRS. CLACKETT. Sardines, sardines. Can't put your feet up on an empty stomach, can you.

(Exit MRS. CLACKETT to service quarters.)

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

ROGER. Well...

VICKI. I think she's terrific.

ROGER. Terrific.

VICKI. So which way?

ROGER. *(Picking up the bags.)* All right. Before she comes back with the sardines.

VICKI. Up here?

ROGER. Yes, yes.

VICKI. In here?

ROGER. Yes, yes, yes.

(Exeunt ROGER and VICKI into mezzanine bathroom.)

VICKI. *(Off.)* It's another bathroom.

(They reappear.)

ROGER. No, no, no.

VICKI. Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

ROGER. I mean in *here.*

(He nods at the next door — the first along the gallery. VICKI leads the way in. ROGER follows.)

VICKI. Oh, black sheets! *(She produces one.)*

ROGER. It's the airing cupboard *(He throws the sheet back.)* This one, this one.

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

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

(Exeunt ROGER and VICKI into the bedroom. Only they can't, because the bedroom door won't open.
The sound of a key in the lock, and the front door opens. On the doorstep stands PHILIP, carrying a cardboard box. He is in his forties, with a deep suntan, and writes attractive new plays with a charming period atmosphere.)

PHILIP. ... No, it's Mrs. Clackett's afternoon off, remember.
LLOYD. Hold it.

(Enter FLAVIA carrying a flight bag like GARRY's. She is in her thirties, the perfect companion piece to the above.)

LLOYD. Hold it.
PHILIP. We've got the place entirely to ourselves.

(PHILIP closes the door. Only the door won't stay closed. A pause, while GARRY struggles to open the door upstairs, and FREDERICK struggles to close the door downstairs.)

LLOYD. And God said, 'Hold it.' And they held it. And God saw that it was terrible.
GARRY. *(To FREDERICK and BELINDA, the actor and actress playing PHILIP and FLAVIA.)* Sorry, loves, this door won't open.
BELINDA. Sorry, love, this door won't close.
LLOYD. And God said, 'Poppy!'
FREDERICK. Sorry, everyone. Am I doing something wrong? You know how stupid I am about doors.

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

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

(Enter POPPY from the wings.)

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

(Exit POPPY into the wings.)

BELINDA. Oh, I love technicals!

GARRY. She loves technicals! *(Fondly.)* Isn't she just, I mean, honestly, she loves technicals! Dotty! Where's Dotty?

BELINDA. Everyone's always so nice to everyone.

GARRY. Oh! Isn't she just, I mean, she really is, isn't she. *(Enter DOTTY from the service quarters. To DOTTY.)* Belinda's being all, you know.

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

FREDERICK. The only thing I like about technicals is you get a chance to sit on the furniture. *(He sits.)*

BELINDA. Oh, Freddie, my precious! It's lovely to see you cheering up and making jokes. *(She sits beside him, and embraces him.)*

FREDERICK. Oh, was that a joke?

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

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

BELINDA. Are you all right, Lloyd, my precious?

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

BELINDA. What did he feel like, Lloyd, my love?

LLOYD. Very pleased he'd taken his Valium.

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

LLOYD. And God said, 'Where the fuck is Tim?' *(Enter from the wings TIM, the company stage manager. He is exhausted.)* And

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

TIM. Do something?

LLOYD. Doors.

TIM. I was doing the front of house.

LLOYD. Doors.

TIM. Doors?

LLOYD. Tim, are you fully awake?

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

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

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

GARRY. And the bedroom won't, you know.

TIM. Oh, right.

(He sets to work on the doors.)

BELINDA. *(To LLOYD.)* He hasn't been to bed for forty-eight hours.

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

(LLOYD comes up on stage.)

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

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

BELINDA. Oh, Lloyd, you're so deep.

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

BELINDA. Oh no!

GARRY. Not already?

BELINDA. Selsdon!
GARRY. Selsdon!
LLOYD. Poppy!
DOTTY. *(To LLOYD.)* I thought he was in front, with you?
LLOYD. I thought he was round the back, with you? *(Enter POPPY from the wings.)* Is Mr. Mowbray in his dressing room?

(Exit POPPY into the wings.)

FREDERICK. Oh, I don't think he would. Not at a technical. *(To BROOKE.)* Would he?
BROOKE. Would who?
GARRY. Selsdon. We can't find him!
FREDERICK. I'm sure he wouldn't. Not at a technical.
DOTTY. Half a chance, he would.
BROOKE. Would what?

(GARRY, DOTTY and LLOYD make gestures to her of tipping a glass, or raising the elbow, or screwing the nose.)

BELINDA. Now come on, my sweets, be fair! We don't know.
FREDERICK. Let's not jump to any conclusions.
LLOYD. Let's just get the understudy dressed. Tim!
TIM. Yes?
LLOYD. Hurry up with those doors. You're going on as the Burglar.
TIM. Oh. Right.
DOTTY. He shouldn't have been out of sight! I said, he must never be out of sight!
BELINDA. He's been as good as gold all the way through rehearsals.
GARRY. Yes, because in the rehearsal room it was all, I don't know, but there we were, do you know what I mean?
LLOYD. There was no set. You could see everyone.
GARRY. And here it's all, you know.
LLOYD. Split into two. There's a front and a back. And instantly we've lost him.

(Enter POPPY from the wings.)

POPPY. He's not in the dressing room.

DOTTY. You've looked in the lavatories?

POPPY. Yes.

DOTTY. And the scenery dock and the prop room and the paint store?

POPPY. Yes.

FREDERICK. *(To DOTTY.)* You've worked with him before, of course.

LLOYD. *(To POPPY.)* Ring the police. *(Exit POPPY into the wings. To TIM.)* Finished the doors? Right, get the Burglar gear on. *(Exit TIM into the wings. Enter SELSDON MOWBRAY from the back of the stalls. He is in his seventies, and is wearing his BURGLAR gear. He comes down the aisle during the following dialogue, and stands in front of the stage, watching everyone on it.)* I'm sorry, Dotty, my love.

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

LLOYD. I cast him.

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

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

LLOYD. We know that, Garry, love.

(BELINDA puts a hand on DOTTY's arm.)

DOTTY. I'm not trying to make my fortune.

FREDERICK. Of course you're not, Dotty.

DOTTY. I just wanted to put a little something by.

BELINDA. We know, love.

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

(BROOKE puts a hand to her eye.)

BELINDA. *(To BROOKE.)* Don't *you* cry, my sweet! It's not *your* fault!

BROOKE. No, I've got something behind my lens.

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

DOTTY. *(Pointing at SELSDON without seeing him.)* But he was standing right there in the stalls before we started! I saw him!

BROOKE. Who are we talking about now?

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

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

(They all turn and see him.)

BELINDA. Selsdon!

GARRY. Oh my God, he's here all the time!

LLOYD. Standing there like Hamlet's father.

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

DOTTY. Where have you been, Selsdon?

BELINDA. Are you all right, Selsdon?

LLOYD. Speak to us!

SELSDON. Is it a party?

BELINDA. 'Is it a party?'!

SELSDON. Is it? How killing! I got it into my head there was going to be a rehearsal. *(He goes up on to the stage.)* I was having a little postprandial snooze at the back of the stalls so as to be ready for the rehearsal.

BELINDA. Isn't he lovely?

LLOYD. Much lovelier now we can see him.

SELSDON. So what are we celebrating?

BELINDA. 'What are we celebrating?'!

(Enter TIM from the wings.)

TIM. I've looked all through his dressing room. I've looked all through the wardrobe. I can't find the gear. *(LLOYD indicates*

SELSDON.) Oh.

SELSDON. Beer? In the wardrobe?

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

TIM. VAT, right.

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

TIM. Spare Burglar costume.

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

TIM. Two spare Burglars.

(Exit TIM into the wings.)

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

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

SELSDON. So what's next on the bill?

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

SELSDON. Oh, I won't, thank you.

LLOYD. You *won't?*

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

BELINDA. No, my sweet, he wants us to rehearse.

SELSDON. Yes, but I think we've got to rehearse, haven't we?

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

(Enter POPPY from the wings, alarmed.)

POPPY. Lloyd...

LLOYD. What? What's happened now?

POPPY. The police!

LLOYD. The *police?*

POPPY. They've found an old man. He was lying unconscious in

a doorway just across the street.

LLOYD. Oh. Yes. Thank you.

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

LLOYD. Thank you, Poppy.

POPPY. Because when you get close to Selsdon...

BELINDA. POPPY!

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

(She stops, sniffing.)

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

(Exit SELSDON into the study.)

BELINDA. Oh, bless him!

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

(POPPY gives him a startled look.)

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

(Enter SELSDON from the study.)

SELSDON. *Not* here?

LLOYD. Yes, yes, there!

BELINDA. Sit down, my precious.

DOTTY. Go back to sleep.

LLOYD. You're not on for another twenty pages yet.

(Exit SELSDON into the study. Exit POPPY into the wings.)

LLOYD. And on we go. *(He goes back down into the auditorium.)* Dotty in the kitchen, wildly roasting sardines. Freddie and Belinda waiting impatiently outside the front door. Garry and Brooke disappearing tremulously into the bedroom. Time sliding irrevocably into the past.

(Exeunt DOTTY into the service quarters, GARRY and BROOKE upstairs into the bedroom, and FREDERICK through the front door.)

BELINDA. *(To LLOYD, with lowered voice.)* Aren't they sweet?

LLOYD. What?

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

LLOYD. Garry and Dotty?

BELINDA. Sh!

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

BELINDA. It's supposed to be a secret.

LLOYD. But she's old enough to be...

BELINDA. Sh! Didn't you know?

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

(Enter GARRY from the bedroom.)

GARRY. What's happening?

LLOYD. I don't like to imagine, Garry, honey.

(Exit BELINDA through the front door.)

GARRY. I mean, what are we waiting for?

(Enter DOTTY from the service quarters, inquiringly.)

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

GARRY. What?

LLOYD. Or maybe just the cue. Brooke! *(Exit DOTTY to the service quarters. Enter BROOKE from the bedroom.)* 'Oh, you're in a real state.'

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

LLOYD. Door closed, love.

(GARRY closes the door.)

VICKI. You can't even get the door open.

(Exeunt ROGER and VICKI into the bedroom. Enter PHILIP through the front door.)

PHILIP. No, it's Mrs. Clackett's afternoon off, remember. *(Enter FLAVIA carrying a flight bag like GARRY's.)* We've got the place entirely to ourselves.

(PHILIP closes the door.)

FLAVIA. Home!

PHILIP. Home, sweet home!

FLAVIA. Dear old house!

PHILIP. Just waiting for us to come back!

FLAVIA. It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!

PHILIP. It's damned serious! If Inland Revenue finds 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 have-

n'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 modernization.)

BURGLAR. No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement... *(He becomes aware of the others.)* No?

LLOYD. No. Not yet. Thank you, Selsdon.

SELSDON. I thought I heard my name.

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

SELSDON. I'm so sorry.

LLOYD. Not at all. Nice to see you. Poppy, put the glass back in the window. *(Enter POPPY. She puts the glass back.)* And, Selsdon....

SELSDON. Yes?

LLOYD. Beautiful performance.

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

(Exit SELSDON through the window.)

LLOYD. He even remembered the line.

FREDERICK. All right, I see all that.

LLOYD. *(Faintly.)* Oh, no!

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

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

GARRY. Of course not, love. *(To FREDERICK.)* I mean, why do I? *(To LLOYD.)* I mean, right, when you come to think about it, why *do* I?

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

BELINDA. Or it could be genetic.

GARRY. Yes, or it could be, you know.

LLOYD. It could well be.

FREDERICK. Of course. Thank you. I understand all that. But...

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

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

LLOYD. All right, I'll give you a reason. You carry those grocer-

ies into the study, Freddie, honey, because it's just slightly after midnight, and we're not going to be finished before we open tomorrow night. Correction — before we open *tonight. (FREDERICK nods, rebuked, and exits into the study. DOTTY silently follows him. GARRY and BROOKE go silently back into the bedroom. LLOYD returns to the stalls.)* And on we go. From after Freddie's exit, *with* the groceries.

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

LLOYD. Oh. *(Pause.)* Freddie! *(Enter FREDERICK, still wounded, from the study.)* I think the point is that you've had a great fright when she mentions income tax, and you feel very insecure and exposed, and you want something familiar to hold on to.

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

(Exit FREDERICK into the study.)

BELINDA. *(To LLOYD.)* Bless you, my sweet.

LLOYD. *(Leaves the stage.)* And on we merrily go. *(Exit BELINDA into the mezzanine bathroom.)* 'Yes, but I could hear voices...'

(Enter ROGER from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie.)

ROGER. Yes, but I could hear voices!

(Enter VICKI from the bedroom in her underwear.)

VICKI. Voices? What sort of voices?

ROGER. People's voices.

VICKI. But there's no one here.

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 banisters.)* Oh, look, she's opened our sardines.

(She moves to go downstairs. ROGER grabs her.)

ROGER. Come back!

VICKI. What?

ROGER. I'll fetch them! You can't go downstairs like that.

VICKI. Why not?

ROGER. Mrs. Crackett.

VICKI. Mrs. Crackett?

ROGER. One has certain obligations.

(Enter MRS. CLACKETT from the study. She is carrying the first plate of sardines.)

MRS. CLACKETT. *(To herself.)* Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like a Sunday school outing. *(ROGER pushes VICKI through the first available door, which happens to be the linen cupboard.)* Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

ROGER. Yes, still poking ... well, still around.

MRS. CLACKETT. In the airing cupboard, were you?

ROGER. No, no. *(The linen cupboard door begins to open. He slams it shut.)* Well, just checking the sheets and 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.)* 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 realizing that she is being addressed.)* Sorry?

(She straightens up sharply. Her head comes into abrupt contact with POPPY's face.)

POPPY. Ugh!
BROOKE. Oh. Sorry.

(BROOKE jumps up to see what damage she has done to POPPY, and steps backward on to GARRY's hand.)

GARRY. Ugh!
BROOKE. Sorry.

(DOTTY hurries to his aid.)

DOTTY. Oh my poor darling! *(To BROOKE.)* You stood on his hand!
FREDERICK. Oh dear. (*He hurriedly clasps a handkerchief to his nose.)*
BELINDA. Oh, look at Freddie, the poor love!

LLOYD. What's the matter with *him*?

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

LLOYD. A nosebleed? No one touched him!

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

FREDERICK. *(From behind his handkerchief.)* I'm so sorry.

LLOYD. Brooke, sweetheart...

BROOKE. I thought you said something to me.

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

BROOKE. Anyway, I've found it.

BELINDA. She's found it!

DOTTY. Where was it, love?

BROOKE. In my eye.

GARRY. In her eye!

BELINDA. *(Hugging her.)* Well done, my sweet.

LLOYD. Not in your left eye?

BROOKE. It had gone round the side.

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

POPPY. I think so.

BELINDA. Freddie?

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

LLOYD. *Now* what?

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

LLOYD. This thing about what?

BELINDA. Well, I won't say the word.

(FREDERICK gets to his feet.)

LLOYD. You mean blood?

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

BELINDA. *(To FREDERICK.)* We all understand, my precious.

LLOYD. All right, clear the stage. Walking wounded carry the

stretcher cases. *(LLOYD returns to the stalls, DOTTY to the service quarters, POPPY to the wings. GARRY and BROOKE go upstairs. BELINDA helps FREDERICK to his feet.)* Right, then. On we bloodily stagger. *(FREDERICK has to reach for a chair again.)* Oh, sorry, Freddie. Let me rephrase that. On we blindly stumble. Brooke, I withdraw that. *(Exit BELINDA along the upstairs corridor, FREDERICK into study.)* From your exit, anyway. 'OK, I'll take it off.... In here, in here.' Where's Selsdon?

GARRY. Selsdon!

LLOYD. Selsdon!

(Enter SELSDON through the front door.)

SELSDON. I think she might have dropped it out here somewhere.

LLOYD. Good. Keep looking. Only another five pages, Selsdon. *(Exit SELSDON through the front door.)* 'Anyway, we can't stand here like this. — Like what?. — In your underwear. — OK, I'll take it off.'

ROGER. In here, in here!

(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.
Enter FLAVIA along the upstairs corridor.)

FLAVIA. Darling, are you coming to bed or aren't you?

(Exit FLAVIA into the bedroom.
Enter ROGER and VICKI from the mezzanine bathroom.)

ROGER. What did you say?
VICKI. I didn't say anything.
ROGER. I mean, first the door handle. Now the hot water bottle...
VICKI. I can feel goose-pimples all over.
ROGER. Yes, quick, get something round you.
VICKI. Get the covers over our heads.

(ROGER is about to open the bedroom door.)

ROGER. Just a moment. What did I do with those sardines? *(He goes downstairs. VICKI makes to follow.)* You — wait here.
VICKI. *(Uneasily.)* You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.
ROGER. Yes, but this one has been extensively modernized throughout. I can't see how anything creepy would survive oil-fired central heating and...
VICKI. What? What is it?

(ROGER stares at the telephone table in silence
The bedroom door opens, and FLAVIA puts ROGER's flight bag on the table outside without looking round. The door closes again.)

VICKI. What's happening?

ROGER. The sardines. They've gone.

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

(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.)* 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 modernization.)

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

(He climbs in.)

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

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

LLOYD. Hold it, Selsdon. Hold it!

BURGLAR. What am I doing now?

LLOYD. *Hold it!*

(Enter POPPY from the wings.)

BURGLAR. I'm breaking into paper bags!

POPPY. Lloyd wants you to hold it.

(Enter BELINDA.)

BURGLAR. Right, what are they offering... ?

BELINDA. Stop, Selsdon, my love! Wait, my precious!

(SELSDON stops, restrained at last by BELINDA's hand on his arm.)

LLOYD. It's like Myra Hess playing on through the air raids.

SELSDON. Stop?

POPPY. Stop.

BELINDA. Stop.

LLOYD. Thank you, Belinda. Thank you, Poppy. *(Exeunt BELINDA and POPPY.)* Selsdon...

SELSDON. I met Myra Hess once.

LLOYD. I think he can hear better than I can.

SELSDON. I beg your pardon?

LLOYD. From your entrance, please, Selsdon.

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

LLOYD. Thank you! Poppy!

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

(Enter POPPY from the wings.)

LLOYD. Put the glass back once more.

SELSDON. Come on again?

LLOYD. Right. Only, Selsdon...

SELSDON. Yes?

LLOYD. A little sooner, Selsdon. A shade earlier. A touch closer to yesterday. All right? Freddie! *(Enter FREDERICK. To SELSDON.)* Start moving as soon as Freddie opens the door. *(To FREDERICK.)* What's the line?

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

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

FREDERICK. 'Stuck with a *problem*'?

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

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

LLOYD. Selsdon...

SELSDON. Only there does seem to be something of a hiatus between Freddie's exit and my entrance.

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

SELSDON. Yes?

LLOYD. How about coming on a little earlier?

SELSDON. We're obviously thinking along the same lines.

(Exit SELSDON through the window.)

LLOYD. Am I putting him on or is he putting me on? Right, Freddie, from your exit.

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

(Exit PHILIP into downstairs bathroom.
Enter BURGLAR as before, but on time.)

BURGLAR. No bars, no burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement. *(He climbs in.)* No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags! So what are they offering? *(He peers at the television.)* One microwave oven. *(He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa.)* What? Fifty quid? Hardly worth lifting it. *(He inspects the paintings and ornaments.)* Junk ... Junk... If you insist... *(He pockets some small item.)* Where's his desk? No, they all say the same thing... 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.'

SELSDON. 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.

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