NOISES OFF

a play in three acts by

Michael Frayn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Original Line</th>
<th>New Line</th>
<th>GENERAL NOTE: &quot;love&quot;→&quot;hun&quot; and &quot;tea&quot;→&quot;coffee&quot; use your judgement when</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Vicki</td>
<td>files to our Basingstoke office</td>
<td>files to our Stratford office</td>
<td>We have decided to adapt some changes in our version of the script, as the setting will be in America, with an American company performing the play Nothing On with British accents. Please take note while reading!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Roger</td>
<td>It's the airing cupboard</td>
<td>It's the linen closet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Mrs. Clackett</td>
<td>In the airing cupboard, were you?</td>
<td>In the linen closet, were you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Roger</td>
<td>something in the airing cupboard!</td>
<td>something in the linen closet!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Vicki</td>
<td>Inland Revenue in Basingstoke</td>
<td>Inland Revenue in Stratford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Burglar</td>
<td>down there in Basingstoke</td>
<td>down there in Stratford</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Act 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Dotty</td>
<td>how about the words, love?</td>
<td>how about the words, hun?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Garry</td>
<td>Here you are, love.</td>
<td>here you are, dear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Garry</td>
<td>Don't worry, love,</td>
<td>don't worry, dear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Garry</td>
<td>we've only had a fortnight to rehearse</td>
<td>we've only had a week to rehearse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Garry</td>
<td>got to play Weston-super-Mare...Yeovil</td>
<td>got to play Cleveland...Chicago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Vicki</td>
<td>files to our Basingstoke office</td>
<td>files to our Stratford office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Roger</td>
<td>It's the airing cupboard</td>
<td>It's the linen closet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Garry</td>
<td>Sorry, love, this door won't open</td>
<td>Sorry, this door won't open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Belinda</td>
<td>Sorry, love, this door won't close</td>
<td>Sorry, this door won't close</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Dotty</td>
<td>wait till we've got to Stockton-on-Tees</td>
<td>wait till we've got to Broadway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Belinda</td>
<td>What did he feel like, Lloyd, my love?</td>
<td>What did he feel like, Lloyd, my dear?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Belinda</td>
<td>Tim, my love, this door won't close</td>
<td>Tim, this door won't close</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Dotty</td>
<td>prop room and the paint store?</td>
<td>prop room and the paint storage?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Lloyd</td>
<td>ring the police</td>
<td>call the police</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Dotty</td>
<td>It's my fault, Lloyd, my love</td>
<td>It's my fault, Lloyd, my dear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Garry</td>
<td>It's my fault, my precious</td>
<td>It's my fault, my dear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Lloyd</td>
<td>we know that, garry, love</td>
<td>we know that, garry, dearest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Selsdon</td>
<td>Is it? How killing!</td>
<td>Is it? Great!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Selsdon</td>
<td>I was having a little postprandial snooze at the back of the stalls</td>
<td>I was having a little snooze at the back of the theater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Lloyd</td>
<td>do all the company's VAT?</td>
<td>do all the company's taxes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Tim</td>
<td>VAT, right</td>
<td>taxes, right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Selsdon</td>
<td>So what's next on the bill?</td>
<td>So what's next on the agenda?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Selsdon</td>
<td>This is the beer in the wardrobe, is it?</td>
<td>There is beer in the wardrobe, though, isn't there?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 Garry</td>
<td>of course not, love</td>
<td>of course not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 Belinda</td>
<td>Bless you, my sweet</td>
<td>bless you, dear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 Mrs. Clackett</td>
<td>In the airing cupboard, were you?</td>
<td>In the linen closet, were you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 Roger</td>
<td>something in the airing cupboard!</td>
<td>something in the linen closet!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Frederick</td>
<td>Pick your feet up one by one</td>
<td>…one at a time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Belinda</td>
<td>Oh, look at Freddie, the poor love</td>
<td>…the poor dear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 Lloyd</td>
<td>Yes… live theatre in Weston-super-Mare</td>
<td>…live theatre in Philadelphia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Dotty</td>
<td>Where was it, love?</td>
<td>Where was it, dear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>It's like Myra Hess playing on through the air raids</td>
<td>It's like the orchestra playing on as the Titanic sank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Selsdon</td>
<td>I met Myra Hess once</td>
<td>My great aunt was on the Titanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Selsdon</td>
<td>Well, it was during the war, at a charity show in Sunderland</td>
<td>Well, she was coming over from Ireland, but she was placed in the poor section and we all know what happened to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>A little sooner, Selsdon. A shade earlier. A touch closer to yesterday.</td>
<td>...A bit earlier. A smidge closer to yesterday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Burglar</td>
<td>WC? I'll fix it.</td>
<td>WC? Water closet? I'll fix it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>Sorry. It's just frightfully difficult doing a quick-change without a dresser</td>
<td>Sorry. It's just quite difficult doing a quick-change without an assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Right, can we... What's going to be left of this show when I've gone off to do Richard III</td>
<td>&quot;What's going to be left of this show when I've gone back to New York to do Richard III&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>What's that, Dad? Right...Brooke, love...very classy places up in London...get a tea break</td>
<td>Brooke, dear...very classy places up in New York...get a coffee break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Dotty</td>
<td>It's usually Poppy, isn't it, love</td>
<td>It's usually Poppy, isn't it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Hush, love</td>
<td>Hush.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Dotty</td>
<td>Is she alright, love?</td>
<td>Is she alright, Lloyd?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>...Need that tea break</td>
<td>...Need that coffee break</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Act 2**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>Act One beginners, please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>Act One beginners, please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>And maybe Act One beginners is what we'll get.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>...together now we've called Beginners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>...to Ashton-under-Lyne...to Stockton-on-Tees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Tim (Top of Page)</td>
<td>I just want...then I'm on the 7:25 back to Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Right. They've had some kind of row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>You've called Beginners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>She's had bust-ups with Garry before, of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Brooke's had a bust-up with Garry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>I mean, they had the famous bust-up...we were playing Worksop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>She went out with this journalist bloke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Tim, let me...sucking boiled sweets...a commercial for Madeira...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Have you done the front-of-house calls?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>Oh, the front-of-house calls!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>...started the front of house calls yet...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Frederick</td>
<td>No, no...she came back to my digs afterwards for a cup of tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>I'm not here! I'm at the Aberystwyth Festival! I'm not here! I'm in New York!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>We're having great...there are old-age pensioners out there...we all start for the gents... ...there are senior citizens out there...we all start for the bathroom...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Nevermind, my love Nevermind, dear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Understudy rehearsal, my love Understudy rehearsal, my dear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Dotty, my love Dotty, my dear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Selsdon</td>
<td>Come on, old girl! Come on, girl!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td>Hush, love. Hush, dear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>There's quite a crowd at the front of the back stalls. There's quite a crowd out there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Then take ten pounds of your own money, Then take ten dollars of your own money,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Selsdon</td>
<td>Come on, girl, get the tabs up! Some of those OAPs out there haven't got long to go. Come on, girl, get your nerve up! Some of those old folks haven't got long to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>Where it says &quot;she whispers urgently to him.&quot; in the stage direction No, no, no, I'm not going to be brushed off, I'm going to tell you because as soon as that curtain goes down, you'll be seeing her, I know that. Well, she's being difficult, isn't she-- I saw you with that cactus, I'm not blind. And then you'll be on the next train back to New York. I'm afraid I'm starting to know the way you operate, Lloyd and I bet there's someone else, even, in Richard III, isn't there, but you just can't walk away from it this time!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133</td>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>Good evening... Welcome to the Old Fishmarket Theatre, Lowestoft, or rather the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees... TBD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Author's Note

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is an interval between Act One and Act One. There is no interval between
Act One and Act One.
The cast of *Noises Off* are performing another play, *Nothing On*. The casting in *Nothing On* is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MRS CLACKETT</td>
<td>Dotty Otley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROGER TRAMPLEMAIN</td>
<td>Garry Lejeune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VICKI</td>
<td>Brooke Ashton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILIP BRENT</td>
<td>Frederick Fellowes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLAVIA BRENT</td>
<td>Belinda Blair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BURGLAR</td>
<td>Selsdon Mowbray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHEIKH</td>
<td>Frederick Fellowes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Director*  
Lloyd Dallas

*Company and StageManager*  
Tim Allgood

*Assistant StageManager*  
Poppy Norton-Taylor

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

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

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

From the estate agent's description of the property:

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

THE ACCOMMODATION COMPRIZES: 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*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mrs Clackett</th>
<th>It's no good you going on. I can't open sardines <em>and</em> answer the phone. I've only got one pair of feet.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>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 <em>I</em> 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...?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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

*She replaces the receiver*

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

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

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

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

**Dotty**

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

*The disembodied voice of Lloyd Dallas, the director of 'Nothing On', replies from somewhere out in the*
Noises Off, Act One page 4

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.
**Noises Off; Act One page 5**

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*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mrs Clackett</th>
<th>Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, don't go away, I'm putting it down.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>She replaces the receiver</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always the same, isn't it. Put your feet up for two minutes, and immediately they come running after you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Only she isn't holding the newspaper</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sound of a key in the lock</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Noises Off, Act One page 6

Lloyd

Hold it.

Roger

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

Lloyd

Hold it, Garry. Dotty!

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...
Noises Off, Act One page 9

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**


**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
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


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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Only she's been in the family for generations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>Great. Come on, then. <em>(She starts upstairs)</em> I've got to be in Basingstoke by four.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Perhaps we should just have a glass of champagne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>We'll take it up with us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Yes. Well ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>And don't let my files out of sight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>No. Only ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Well ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>Her?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>She <em>has</em> been in the family for generations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>So which way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td><em>(picking up the bags)</em> All right. Before she comes back with the sardines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>Up here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>Yes, yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>In here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>Yes, yes, yes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exeunt Roger and Vicki into mezzanine bathroom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td><em>(off)</em> It's another bathroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They reappear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>No, no, no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td>Always trying to get me into bathrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>I mean in <em>here</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He nods at the next door - the first along the gallery.  
**Vicki leads the way in. Roger follows**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td>Oh, black sheets! <em>(She produces one)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>It's the airing cupboard <em>(He throws the sheet back)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?
Noises Off, Act One page 27

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 sweet, 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.
Noises Off, Act One page 30

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.

Brooke          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!
Noises Off, Act One page 34

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?

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.

_Exit 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!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philip</th>
<th>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.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flavia</td>
<td>I'll tell you what I feel like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Champagne? <em>(He takes a bottle out of the box)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavia</td>
<td>I wonder if Mrs Clackett's aired the beds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Darling!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavia</td>
<td>Well, why not? No children. No friends dropping in. We're absolutely on our own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>True. <em>(He picks up the bag and box and ushers Flavia towards the stairs)</em> There is something to be said for being a tax exile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavia</td>
<td>Leave those!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

| Philip | Sh! |
| Flavia | What? |
| Philip | *(humorously)* Inland Revenue may hear us! |
They creep to the bedroom door

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

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

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

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

Mrs Clackett jumps up

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

Philip  So did mine!

Flavia  We thought you’d gone!

Mrs Clackett  I thought you was in Spain!

Philip  We are! We are!

Flavia  You haven’t seen us!

Philip  We’re not here!

Mrs Clackett  Oh, like that, is it? The income tax are after you?
Flavia  They would be, if they knew we were here.

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

Philip  Oh...

Flavia  Well...

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

Philip  Oh. Yes. Thanks.

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

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

Flavia  I'll get a hot water bottle.

*Exit Flavia into the mezzanine bathroom*

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

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

Mrs Clackett  Not the ones from the income tax, dear. I don't want to spoil your holidays.
Philip            Oh good heavens! Where are they?
Mrs Clackett     I've put them all in the pigeonhouse.
Philip            In the *pigeonhouse*?
Mrs Clackett     In the little pigeonhouse in your desk, love.

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

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

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

Roger            Yes, but I could hear voices!

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear*

Vicki             Voices? What sort of voices?

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

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

Lloyd            No.
Frederick               I thought it might be somehow more logical.

Lloyd                   No.

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

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


Enter Belinda from the mezzanine bathroom, to wait patiently

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

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

Frederick               I see that.
Belinda                 And Freddie, my sweet, Selsdon needs them in the study for his scene.

Frederick               I see that...

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

Belinda                 (calling, urgently) Selsdon!

Dotty                   (likewise) Selsdon!
Garry  (likewise) Selsdon!

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

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

He becomes aware of the others.

No?

Lloyd  No. Not yet. Thank you, Selsdon.

Selsdon  I thought I heard my name.

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

Selsdon  I'm so sorry.

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

Enter Poppy. She puts the glass back.

And, Selsdon...

Selsdon  Yes?
Lloyd  Beautiful performance.

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

                  Exit Selsdon through the window.

Lloyd  He even remembered the line.

Frederick  All right, I see all that.

Lloyd  *(faintly)* Oh, no!

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

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

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

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

Belinda  Or it could be genetic.

Garry  Yes, or it could be, you know.
Lloyd

It could well be.

Frederick

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

Lloyd

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

Frederick

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

Lloyd

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

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

Lloyd returns to the stalls

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

Belinda

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

Lloyd

Oh. (Pause) Freddie!
Enter Frederick, still wounded, from the study

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

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

Exit Frederick into the study

Belinda (to Lloyd) Bless you, my sweet.

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

Exit Belinda into the mezzanine bathroom

'Yes, but I could hear voices…'

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

Roger Yes, but I could hear voices!

Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear

Vicki Voices? What sort of voices?

Roger People's voices.

Vicki But there's no one here.
Roger                   Darling, I saw the door-handle move! It could be someone from the office, checking up.

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

Roger                   Mrs Crackett.

Vicki                   Mrs Crackett?

Roger                   One has to set an example to the staff.

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

*She moves to go downstairs. Roger grabs her*

Roger                   Come back!

Vicki                   What?

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

Vicki                   Why not?

Roger                   Mrs Crackett.

Vicki                   Mrs Crackett?

Roger                   One has certain obligations.
Enter Mrs Clackett from the study. She is carrying the first plate of sardines

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

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

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

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

Mrs Clackett In the airing cupboard, were you?

Roger No, no.

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

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

Mrs Blackett...

Mrs Clackett Clackett, dear, Clackett.

She puts down the sardines beside the other sardines

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

Mrs Clackett  I haven't seen no one, dear.

Roger      I thought I heard voices.

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

Roger      I must have imagined it.

Philip     (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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flavia</th>
<th>Nothing but flapping doors in this house.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Exit Flavia into the bedroom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Enter from the study Philip, holding a tax demand and its envelope</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>'... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint... proceedings in court...'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Clacket</td>
<td>Oh yes, and that reminds me, a gentleman come about the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Don't tell me. I'm not here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Clacket</td>
<td>He says he's got a lady quite aroused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Leave everything to Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Clacket</td>
<td>All right, love. I'll let them go all over, shall I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Let them do anything. Just so long as you don't tell anyone we're here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Clacket</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 / lock the door? Why did you lock the door!

Roger

/ 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!

Omnès

*(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*
Noises Off, Act One page 59

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


*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.'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roger</th>
<th>In here, in here!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>He ushers her into the bedroom</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope, and a tube of glue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Darling, this glue. Is it the sort you can never get unstuck...? Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exit Philip into the study with the tax demand, envelope, glue and one of the plates of sardines from the telephone table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the hot water bottle. He looks up and down the landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enter Vicki from the bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>Now what?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Noises Off, Act One page 60

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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>Get the covers over our heads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Just a moment. What did I do with those sardines?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He goes downstairs. Vicki makes to follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You - wait here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td><em>(uneasily)</em> You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Yes, but this one has been extensively modernized throughout. I can't see how anything creepy would survive oil-fired central heating and...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>What? What is it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roger stares at the telephone table in silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The bedroom door opens, and Flavia puts Roger's flight bag on the table outside without looking round. The door closes again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>What's happening?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>The sardines. They've gone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>Perhaps there is something funny going on. I'm going to get into bed and put my head under the...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?
**Noises Off, Act One page 63**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki sees the empty table outside the bedroom door</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td>No bag!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>No bag?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td>Your bag! Suddenly! Here! Now - gone!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>It's in the bedroom. I put it in the bedroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exit Roger into the bedroom</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td>Don't go in there!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enter Roger from the bedroom</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>The box!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td>The box!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>They've both gone!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td>Oh! My files!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roger</strong></td>
<td>What on earth's happening? Where's Mrs Spratchett?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>He starts downstairs. Vicki follows him</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You wait in the bedroom.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicki</strong></td>
<td>No! No! No!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vicki</th>
<th>Roger! There's a strange figure in there! Where are you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is another cry from Philip, off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exit Vicki blindly through the front door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Darling, I know this is going to sound silly, but...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He struggles to get the tax demand unstuck from his fingers, encumbered by the plate of sardines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavia</td>
<td>Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>I can't come to bed! I'm glued to a tax demand!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavia</td>
<td>Darling, why don't you put the sardines down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philip puts the plate of sardines down on the table. But when he takes his hand away the sardines come with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>Darling, I'm stuck to the sardines!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Noises Off, Act One page 66

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flavia</th>
<th>Darling, don't play the fool. Get that bottle marked poison in the downstairs loo. That eats through anything.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td><em>(flapping the tax demand)</em> I've heard of people getting <em>stuck</em> with a problem, but this is ridiculous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exit Philip into the downstairs bathroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Selsdon...? You're on, Selsdon. We're there. The moment's arrived...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda</td>
<td><em>(off)</em> It's all right, love. He's coming, he's coming...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>But his arm should be coming through that window even before Freddie's off!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A pane of glass shatters in the mullion window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Ah. And here it is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The window opens, and through it appears an elderly Burglar. He has great character, but is in need of extensive repair and modernization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglar</td>
<td>No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
Noises Off

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 dematerialized before? Has anything ever...?

He sees the television set on the sofa.

... flown about?

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

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

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

He opens the study door and then closes it again

There's a man in there!

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

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

Mrs Clackett: (glancing briefly) I can't see no one.
Roger: You can't see him? But this is extraordinary! And where is my prospective tenant? I left her in there! She's gone! My prospective tenant has disappeared!

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

Mrs Clackett: Now what?

Roger: There!

Mrs Clackett: Where?

Roger: The sardines!

Mrs Clackett: Oh, the sardines.

Roger: You can see the sardines?

Mrs Clackett: I can see the sardines.

Roger touches them cautiously, then picks up the plate.

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

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

He goes upstairs, holding the sardines.
Mrs Clackett  
I'm going to be opening sardines all night, in and out of here like a cuckoo on a clock.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the service quarters

Roger  
Vicki! Vicki!

Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom

Enter Burglar from the study, carrying an armful of silver cups, etc.

Burglar  
No, I miss the violence. I miss having other human beings around to terrify...

He dumps the silverware on the sofa, and exits into the study

Enter Roger from mezzanine bathroom

Roger  
Where's she gone? Vicki?

Exit Roger into the linen cupboard

Enter Burglar from the study, carrying Philip's box and bag. He empties the contents of the box out behind the sofa, and loads the silverware into the box

Burglar  
It's nice to hear a bit of shouting and screaming around you. All this silence gets you down...
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 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.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burglar</th>
<th>Right, that's downstairs tidied up a bit. <em>(He starts upstairs.)</em> Just give the upstairs a quick going-over for them.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Exit the Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Enter Vicki, holding the sardines and a white bathmat, and Roger, carrying the box and bag, from the downstairs bathroom.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td><strong>A bathmat?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Better than nothing!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>I can't go around in front of our taxpayers wearing a bathmat!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>The bedroom, then! There must be something in the bedroom!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(He leads the way upstairs.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>No, no, no, no! I'm not going in that bedroom again!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td><em>I'll</em> look in the bedroom. You look in the other bathroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Exit Roger into the bedroom and Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Enter Philip through the front door</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Philip

Darling! Help! Where are you?

Enter Vicki from the mezzanine bathroom

Vicki

Roger! Roger!

Exit Philip hurriedly, unseen by Vicki, into the downstairs bathroom

There's someone in the bathroom now!

Vicki runs towards the bedrooms, then stops.

Flavia

(off) Oh, darling, I'm finding such lovely things...!

Vicki turns and runs downstairs instead, as Flavia enters along the upstairs corridor, absorbed in the china tea service she is carrying.

Vicki exits hurriedly into the downstairs bathroom.

Do you remember this china tea service -

Vicki screams, off.

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

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

Who are you?
Vicki  Oh, no - it's his wife and dependents!

She puts her hands over her face

Enter Philip from the downstairs bathroom, still with his hands encumbered, holding the bathmat now as well, and keeping his trousers up with his elbows

Philip  Excuse me, I think you've dropped your dress!

Flavia gasps. Philip looks up at the gallery and sees her

(To Flavia) Where have you been? I've been going mad! Look at the state I'm in!

He holds up his hands to show Flavia the state he is in, and his trousers fall down. The tea service slips from Flavia's horrified hands, and rains down on the floor of the living-room below. Philip hurries towards the stairs, trousers round his ankles, his hands extended in supplication

Darling, honestly!

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

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

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

**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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burglar</th>
<th>Just doing the taps, governor.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Attacks? Not attacks on women?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglar</td>
<td>Try anything, governor, but I'll do the taps on the bath first.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom**

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

**Exit Roger into the downstairs bathroom**

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burglar</th>
<th>Enter Roger from the downstairs bathroom. The Burglar stops.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>If I can't find her, you're going to be in trouble, you see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglar</td>
<td>WC? I'll fix it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom again**

| Roger | Vicki ... ? |

*Noises Off, Act One page 85*
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 bedsheets.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vicki</th>
<th>Roger!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(together)</td>
<td>(together)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flavia</th>
<th>Him and his floozie! I'll break this over their heads!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Roger  
... let's start downstairs.

Roger, Philip and Vicki go downstairs
Flavia  Who are you? Who are these creatures?

Roger  
(to Philip and Vicki) I'm sorry about this. I don't know who she is. No connection with the house, I assure you.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, with another plate of sardines. Roger advances to introduce her

Whereas this good lady with the sardines, on the other hand...

Mrs Clackett  No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines, 'cause this time I'm eating them.

Roger  ... is fully occupied with her sardines, so perhaps the toilet facilities would be of more interest.

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

Flavia  Mrs Clackett, who are these people?

Mrs Clackett  Oh, we get them all the time, love. They're just Arab sheets.

Roger  I'm sorry about this.

He opens the door to the mezzanine bathroom

But in here...

Flavia  Arab sheets?
Exit Flavia into the bedroom

Roger
In here we have...

Enter the Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom

Burglar
Ballcocks, governor. Your ballcocks have gone.

Roger
We have him.

Enter Flavia from the bedroom

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

Mrs Clackett
Oh, the thieving devils!

Roger
In the study, however...

Mrs Clackett
You give me that sheet, you devil!

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

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

Roger
It's you!

Flavia
It's her!

Flavia comes downstairs menacingly
Exit Philip discreetly into the study

Burglar

It's my little girl!

Vicki

Dad!

Flavia stops

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

Burglar

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

Mrs Clackett

Well, would you believe it?

Vicki

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

Burglar

What are you doing here like that?

Vicki

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

Philip/Tim

Agh!

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

Flavia

(threateningly) So where's my other sheet?

Enter through the front door the most sought-after of all
Ah! A house of heavenly peace! I rent it!

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!

Yes - it's my husband!

What?

They all fall upon him.

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

Trousers!

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

What? What?

Trousers! Trousers!

You snatch my bathmat! *(She tries to pull his burnous off him)*
Noises Off, Act One page 91

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

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

*Everyone except Selsdon finally comes to a halt.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burglar</th>
<th>And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*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! |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frederick</th>
<th>Sorry. It's just frightfully difficult doing a quick-change without a dresser.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lloyd</th>
<th>Get Tim to help you. Tim! Where's Tim? Come on, Tim! Tim!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
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

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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<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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*

*(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 Vicki's ear and shouts.)* 'What's that, Dad?' *(All patience and politeness again.)* That's all. Nothing else. I'm not being unreasonable, am I?

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

Exit? Does it say 'exit'?

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

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

*Exit Lloyd through the front door*

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

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

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

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

Frederick
I suppose that was all my fault.

Garry
But why pick on, you know?

Dotty
Yes, why Brooke?

Belinda
I thought it was quite sweet, actually.

Garry
Sweet?

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

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

Belinda
Didn't you know?

Selsdon
Brooke and Lloyd?

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

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

He stops, conscious that Tim is behind the sofa.

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

Belinda
Sh! Here they come!
Enter Lloyd with his arm round Brooke

Lloyd  OK. All forgotten. I was irresistible.

Poppy  I think I'm going to be sick.

Exit Poppy into the wings

Dotty  Oh, no!

Lloyd  Oh, for heaven's sake!

Exit Lloyd after Poppy

Garry  You mean ... ?

Selsdon  Her, too?

Frederick  Oh great Scott!

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

Brooke  I think I'm going to faint.

Dotty  Yes, sit down, love!

They sit Brooke down.

Belinda  Quick - do your meditation.

Selsdon  Well, that's something she didn't know!
Belinda                Hush, love.

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

Frederick            Whatever next?

Selsdon              Most exciting!

Belinda              *(indicating Brooke)* Sh!

Selsdon              Oh, yes. Sh!

Dotty                Here he comes.

*Enter Lloyd from the wings, subdued*

Is she all right, love?

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

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

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

Belinda              Which?

Garry                *(offering a chair)* Faint?
Belinda  *(offering a vase)* Or be sick?

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

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

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

Selsdon  Me? Last line? Right.

Burglar  But I'll tell you one thing, Vicki.

Vicki  *(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 II

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

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

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

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

Poppy is speaking into the microphone in the prompt corner.

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

Tim And maybe Act One beginners is what we'll get. What do you think?
Poppy  
(to Tim) Oh, Dotty'll pull herself together now we've called Beginners. Now she knows she's got to be on stage in five minutes. Won't she?

Tim  
Will she?

Poppy  
You know what Dotty's like.

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

Poppy  
If only she'd speak!

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

Poppy  
Won't go on?

Tim  
If she won't.

Poppy  
She will.

Tim  
Of course she will.

Poppy  
Won't she?

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

Poppy  
She must!

Tim  
She will, she will. But if she didn't...
Poppy I'd have five minutes to change. Four minutes.

Tim If only she'd say something.

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

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

_Exit Poppy in the direction of the dressing-rooms_

Lloyd 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 seventhrty?

**Tim**

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

**Lloyd**

She hasn't walked out already?

**Tim**

No one knows *what* she's doing! She's locked in her dressing-room! She won't speak to anyone!
Lloyd You've called Beginners?

Tim Yes!

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

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

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

Tim Brooke? Not Brooke - Dotty!

Lloyd Oh, Dotty.

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

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

Tim She went out with this journalist bloke ...

Lloyd Journalist - yes, yes...

Tim But you know Garry threatened to kill him?

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

Tim Yes, but now it's happened again! Two o'clock this morning I'm woken up by this great banging on my door.
It's Garry. Do I know where Dotty is? She hasn't come home.

**Lloyd**

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

**Tim**

Yes, but Lloyd...

**Lloyd**

Have you done the front-of-house calls?

**Tim**

Oh, the front-of-house calls!

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

**Lloyd**

And don't let Poppy see those flowers!
Exit Lloyd through the pass door

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

Enter Poppy from the dressing-rooms

Poppy We're going to be so late up!

Tim No luck?

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

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

Poppy Whisky!

Tim Oh... is it?

Poppy Where did you find that?

Tim Well...

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

Tim Oh...

Poppy I'll put it in the ladies' loo. At least he won't go in there.
Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms

No?

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

Poppy He's hiding them round the stage now.

Enter Frederick from the dressing-rooms

No?

Frederick No.

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

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

Belinda He's hiding them on stage now.

Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms, holding the whisky

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

Belinda Oh, my poor sweet!

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

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

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

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

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

**Tim** This is getting farcical.

**Belinda** Money.

**Tim** Money?

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

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

_Does an elegant bow with his arm, hurriedly grabs his raincoat from a peg and exits into the dressing-rooms_.

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

**Belinda** Last night?

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

Belinda She was with you? You were with her?

Frederick She was being very sympathetic about all my troubles.

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

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

Enter Poppy

Poppy And another thing.

Belinda Nothing else, my sweet!

Poppy Where's Selsdon?

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

Poppy He's not in his dressing-room.

Belinda Oh - I might have guessed!

Poppy Oh - the front-of-house calls!

Belinda You do the calls. I'll took for Selsdon.
Frederick  What shall I do?

Belinda  *(firmly)* Absolutely nothing at all.

Frederick  Right.

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

*Exit Belinda to the dressing-rooms*

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

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

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

Poppy  Selsdon wants to kill someone?

Tim  Garry, Garry... Selsdon?

Poppy  We've lost him.

Tim  Oh, not again!

Poppy  Flowers!

Tim  *(embarrassed)* Oh... Well... They're just... You know...
Poppy (taking them) Oh, Tim that's really sweet of you!

Tim Oh... Well...

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

Frederick Very charming.

She kisses Tim

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

Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms

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

Frederick Oh, I think Poppy's done them.

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

He takes the flowers from Frederick

Frederick Oh dear, I think she said three minutes.

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

Frederick I think so.

Tim Hold these. *(He gives Frederick the flowers.)*

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

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

Frederick Any luck?

Belinda No, but I found yet another bottle.

Frederick Oh dear.

Tim Oh ...

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

Frederick Oh my Lord!

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

*Poppy runs in from the dressing-rooms.*

Poppy He's not in the pub...

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

I'd better get the spare gear on.

Exit Tim to the dressing-rooms with the whisky

Poppy

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

Frederick

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

Poppy

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

Enter Lloyd through the pass door

Lloyd

What the fuck is going on?

Belinda

Lloyd!

Frederick

Great Scott!

Poppy

I didn't know you were here!

Lloyd

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

Belinda

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

Lloyd

We're having great dramas out there! (To Poppy) This is the matinee, honey! There's old-age pensioners out there! 'The curtain will rise in three minutes' -
we all start for the Gents. 'The curtain will rise in one minute' - we all come running out again. We don't know which way we're going!

**Poppy**

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

**Lloyd**

(*kissing her*) Of course, honey, of course.

Looking forward to it.

**Poppy**

You got my message?

**Lloyd**

Many, many messages.

**Poppy**

Why didn't you answer?

**Lloyd**

I did! I have! I'm here!

**Poppy**

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

**Lloyd**

Go on, then.

**Poppy**

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

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

**Belinda**

Brooke!

*Lloyd hastily abandons Poppy.*

**Lloyd**

(*to Poppy*) Later, later. All right?
Brooke holds up the whisky.

Belinda

Oh, no! Not another one!

Brooke

In my dressing-room!

Belinda

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

Frederick

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

Lloyd

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

Brooke

(sees him) Lloyd! (Peers) Lloyd?

Lloyd

Got it in one. (Kisses her.)

Brooke

You got my message?

Lloyd

And came running, honey, and came running.

Brooke

Lloyd, we've got to have a talk.

Lloyd

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

Brooke

When?

Lloyd

Later, yes? Later.

He goes to take the whisky from Frederick, but is
distracted by seeing the flowers that Frederick is holding

Flowers?

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

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

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

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

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

Frederick Right.

*Lloyd goes towards the pass door.*

Belinda But what about Dotty?

Lloyd I don't want to hear about Dotty.

Frederick And Garry?

Lloyd Not about Garry, either.

Belinda What about Selsdon?
Lloyd

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

Brooke

Lloyd!

Poppy

Wait!

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

Brooke

(to Poppy) Excuse me!

Poppy

I've got to talk to him!

Frederick

(separating them) Girls, girls!

Brooke

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

Frederick

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

Brooke

I beg your pardon?

Poppy

Honestly!

Belinda

(firmly) Brooke, you sit down and do your meditation. Poppy, you go and see what's happening with Dotty and Garry.
Noises Off, Act Two page 19

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

Freddie, my sweet precious ...

Frederick Did I say something wrong?

Enter Selsdon hurriedly through the pass door

Selsdon Where’s Tim?

Belinda Selsdon! My sweet! Where have you been?

Frederick Are you all right?

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

Oh dear.

He hurriedly puts it out of sight behind his back.

Belinda We've been looking for you everywhere!


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

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

Belinda My love, I think he's heard.
Selsdon  Oh, everything! Oh, he really went for her! 'I know when you've got your eye on someone!'

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

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

Frederick  Which poor halfwit?

Belinda  Never mind, my love.

Frederick  Not Tim?

Belinda  No, no, no.

Frederick  But who else is there? Apart from me?

*Enter Poppy from the dressing-rooms*

Poppy  I think they're coming.

Belinda  They're coming!

Frederick  They're coming!

Selsdon  I knew they wouldn't.

Poppy  And you're here!

Selsdon  Oh, yes, every word!
Poppy Right. *Into the microphone* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The performance is about to begin.

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

Tim They're coming.

Belinda And we've found Selsdon.

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

Selsdon How? Through the wall!

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

Poppy I've done it!

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

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

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

Poppy Yes! About to begin, about to begin!

Tim *(into the microphone)* ... is about to... is about to begin *at any moment.*
Belinda  Poor Lloyd! He'll choke on his toffees.

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

Tim  *(realises)* Oh...

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

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

*Enter Garry from the dressing-rooms*

Belinda  Garry, my sweet!

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

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

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

Selsdon  What does he say?

Belinda  He's not saying anything, Selsdon, my sweet.
Selsdon  Very sensible. Only stir it up again. 'I've seen you giving him little nods and smiles!' - that's what he kept saying.

Enter Dotty from the dressing-rooms

Belinda  Dotty, my love!

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

Frederick  Are you all right?

Selsdon  Is she all right?

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

Belinda  (to Selsdon) She's fine.

Tim  All right, everyone?

Selsdon  'Little hugs and squeezes.'

Belinda  Hush, love.

Poppy  Curtain up?

Everyone looks anxiously from Dotty to Garry and back again. Dotty and Garry both ignore the looks. They stand aloof, then both at the same moment turn to
check their appearance in the little mirrors fixed to the
back of the set

Frederick

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

Belinda

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

Pause. Neither Garry nor Dotty has apparently heard

Dotty

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

Belinda

That's the spirit!

Frederick

Well done, Dotty!

Tim

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

Poppy

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

Selsdon

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

Poppy

Right. Quiet, then, please...

Frederick

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

Selsdon

Let me just say one word. Sardines!
Belinda  Sardines!

Frederick  Sardines!

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

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

Enter Lloyd through the pass door

Lloyd  Now what?

Tim  We’re just going up.

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

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

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

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

Lloyd  Anybody else have thoughts they feel they must communicate?

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

What?

Poppy

I mean, you know, later...

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

Tim

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

Lloyd

And you didn't buy any flowers for me?

Tim

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

Lloyd

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

Tim

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

Lloyd

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

Tim

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

Lloyd

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

Exit Lloyd through the pass door. Poppy sobs.
Frederick

Oh dear.

Belinda

Don't cry, Poppy, love

Selsdon

Just get the old bus on the road.

Poppy

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

Garry

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

Poppy

Quiet backstage!

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

Belinda

Hush, love.

Poppy

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

*The introductory music for Nothing On.*

Tabs going up...

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

As the curtain rises the telephone is ringing.

*Dotty makes her entrance* ------ Enter from the service quarters
Mrs Clackett, carrying a plate of sardines

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

There is a sound of scattered applause.----  ---- She pauses a beat to acknowledge the applause.

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

A small laugh. -------------------------------------  ---- Puts the sardines down on the telephone table by the sofa, and picks up the phone

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

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

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...

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

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

Belinda watches apprehensively as Frederick gives Garry's arm a silently
sympathetic squeeze, and smilingly
puts his fingers to his lips to remind
him to be quiet. Garry shakes him off
indignantly.

Belinda hurries across to draw
Fredrick off.

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

Garry drops his props and threatens
to hit Frederick.

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

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.

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

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

----- The front door opens. On the
doorstep stands Roger, holding a
cardboard box.
Roger ... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

Brooke makes her entrance

----- Enter Vicki through the front door.

So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

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.

I'll just check. As Garry comes through the service quarters he takes another look.

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

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

Hello? Anyone at home?

He stamps on Frederick's foot and re-enters

----- Closes the door

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

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

Vicki All these doors!

Roger Oh, only a handful, really.
Garry keeps appearing at the various doors, trying to see what Dotty and Frederick are up to.  

----- He opens the various doors one after another to demonstrate.  

Study... Kitchen... And a self-contained service flat for the housekeeper.

Belinda makes things worse by trying to move Dotty's head to a less suggestive position.

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

Roger What?

Vicki You know ...

Roger The usual offices? Through here.

Garry comes off and rushes at Frederick and Dotty.

Belinda pushes him back on stage.

----- He opens the downstairs bathroom door for her

Vicki Fantastic.

Exit Vicki into the bathroom

Belinda just manages to detach Dotty from her ministrations and get her back on stage for her entrance.

----- Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, without the newspaper
Mrs Clackett  Now I've lost the sardines...

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

Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom, and slips the champagne back into the bag.

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

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

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

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

Well, to check some of the measurements...

Roger closes it

And again -------------------------------

----- The bathroom door opens.

Do one or two odd jobs...

Roger closes it

Belinda suddenly points out that

Oh, and a client. I'm showing a
Selsdon has discovered the whisky that Frederick left on the chair. Selsdon opens the bottle, smells it, closes it again, and then goes off to the dressing-rooms with it.

The bathroom door opens.

Vicki What's wrong with this door?

Roger closes it.

Frederick goes to run after Selsdon. Belinda silently urges him to wait there - sit still - do absolutely nothing - while she runs after Selsdon.

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

Dotty makes her exit

puts down the sardines, shaking her head with misery, and begins to weep.

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

Roger I'm sorry about this.

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

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

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.

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

At the last moment Dotty realises she 
hasn't got the newspaper.

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.

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

... to make her entrance. ---------

----- 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.*

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.

They turn to watch her anxiously as she makes her exit.

-----  *Exit Mrs Clackett to service quarters*

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

Selsdon seizes the opportunity to depart again to the dressing-rooms.

Roger  Well...

Vicki  I think she's terrific.

Roger  Terrific.
Belinda runs after Selsdon. Frederick goes to run after her, but turns anxiously back to reassure Dotty.

Vicki So which way?

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

Vicki Up here?

Roger Yes, yes.

Vicki In here?

Roger Yes, yes, yes.

----- Exeunt Roger and Vicki into mezzanine bathroom

Vicki (off) It's another bathroom.

They reappear

Roger No, no, no.

Vicki Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

Roger I mean in here.

He nods at the next door - the first along the gallery. Vicki leads the way in.
Garry appears in the linen cupboard doorway.                      -----  Roger follows

He takes a good look at the earnest colloquy between Frederick and Dotty.

Garry takes the sheet from Vicki                                  -----  She produces one.

Roger  It's the airing cupboard

Garry hurls the sheet at Frederick and Dotty.                      -----  This one, this one.

He goes back on stage.

Dotty starts to run off to get Belinda, but has to run back to help Frederick.

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

Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the bedroom

Belinda runs in from the dressing-room, holding the bottle of whisky.

The sound of a key in the lock, and the front door opens. On the doorstep stands Philip, carrying a cardboard box.

She grabs the flight bag, just manages to give the whisky to Dotty, and...

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

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

Flavia Home!

Philip Home, sweet home!

Flavia Dear old house!

Philip Just waiting for us to come back!

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

Philip picks up the bag and box and ushers Flavia towards the stairs.

Philip There is something to be said for being a tax exile.

Flavia Leave those!

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

Philip Sh!
**Noises Off, Act Two page 39**

**Flavia** What?

**Philip** Inland Revenue may hear us!

They creep to the bedroom door

**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!

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

Garry takes it off her as she makes her entrance.

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs Clackett  I thought you was in Spain!

Philip  We are! We are!

Flavia  You haven't seen us!

Philip  We're not here!

Mrs Clackett  You'll want your things, look. (She indicates the bag and box)

Philip  Oh. Yes. Thanks.

He comes downstairs, and picks up the bag and box

Exit Selsdon to the dressing-rooms with the whisky.

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

Flavia  I'll get a hot water bottle.

Belinda makes her exit.

-------------------

----- Exit Flavia into the mezzanine bathroom

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

Philip  Oh good heavens. Where are they?
rooms and repeats Selsdon's incomprehensible gesture of pulling a chain. Exit Belinda towards the dressing-room.

Mrs Clackett

I've put them all in the pigeonhouse.

Philip In the pigeonhouse?

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

Garry, still on the platform, tries to see what Dotty and Frederick are doing, but is fetched back by Brooke...

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

---------------

Roger Yes, but I could hear voices!

Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear

Vicki Voices? What sort of voices?

Roger People's voices.

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

She moves to go downstairs. Roger grabs her

Roger Come back!
Dotty and Belinda run towards the dressing-rooms instead, but Dotty immediately has to run back to the study door to go on. Belinda runs back to the props table for the sardines, gives them to Dotty, just in time for her...

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.

Brooke makes her exit

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

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

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

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

Mrs Clackett In the airing cupboard,
were you?

**Roger** No no.

... to open the linen cupboard door.

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

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

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

He starts downstairs

Mrs Blackett...

_Belinda gestures hastily to Tim in passing to explain the situation, and exits to the dressing-rooms._

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

She puts down the sardines beside the other sardines

Tim asks Frederick where she is going.

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

Frederick demonstrates raising the elbow.

**Mrs Clackett** I haven't seen no one, dear.

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

**Roger** I thought I heard voices.

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

**Roger** I must have imagined it.
Philip breaks off from the conversation to say

----- Philip (off) Oh good Lord above!

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

Roger I beg your pardon?

Mrs Clackett Oh good Lord above, the study door's open.

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

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

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

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

Flavia Nothing but flapping doors in this house.
Exit Flavia into the bedroom

Frederick has to hand Garry the flowers in order to make his entrance.

Brooke comes down from the platform and asks Garry what she is supposed to do with the axe. Garry takes it thoughtfully and puts the flowers into her hands. Belinda, coming down from the platform to go off after Selsdon, stops at the sight of Garry with the axe, as he looks at it and feels the edge. He looks at the door through which Frederick will exit. Belinda looks at the door likewise. Garry looks back at the axe. Belinda looks back at the axe. Garry begins to smile an evil smile. Horrified, Belinda quickly takes the flowers from Brooke and sends her off in her place to find Selsdon, then tries to get the axe away from Garry. Garry holds it behind his back. Belinda, still holding the flowers, puts her arms round Garry, trying to reach the axe.

Dotty appears

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

Philip '... final notice... steps will be taken... distrain... proceedings in court...'

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

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

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

----- Exit Mrs Clackett to the service quarters
arms round Garry.

Poppy urges Belinda upstairs for her entrance. Belinda flees up to the platform and opens the door to make her entrance.

She makes one desperate effort to grab the dress from the backstage hook where it is hanging, then gives up, and enters still carrying the flowers instead.

Belinda, on stage, has to vary the line.

Dotty launches herself upon Garry. He produces the axe in explanation of his behaviour. Dotty snatches it from him, and raises it to hit him.

----- Enter Flavia from the bedroom.

----- She is holding flowers instead of the dress that Vicki arrived in.

Flavia Darling, I never had a dress...

----- ... or rather a bunch of flowers like this, did I?

Philip (abstracted) Didn't you?

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

Philip I should never have touched it.

Flavia No, it's lovely.

Philip Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.
Frederick appears
---------------------
and snatches the axe from Dotty, in the nick of time. He innocently gives it to Garry, who raises it to hit Frederick. Dotty snatches it from Garry, and raises it once again to hit him.

Belinda appears
---------------------
and snatches the axe from Dotty...

... as Garry makes his entrance.
---------

Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms. He grabs the axe from Belinda and returns to the dressing-rooms.

Belinda is going to follow him, but then realizes that there is...

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

Garry on stage repeats the line.
---------

----- Exit Philip into study

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

----- Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor

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

Roger All right, all right... Now the study door's open again! What's going on?

He puts the sardines down - one plate on the telephone table, where it was before, one near the front door - and goes towards the study...

----- Knocking!

----- Knocking...! Knocking...?

Upstairs!

He runs upstairs.
Belinda realises what's wrong, and knocks on the set with a prop.

----- Knocking.

Oh my God, there's something in the airing cupboard!

He unlocks it and opens it.

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.

Oh, it's you.

----- Looks for Vicki

He improvises.

----- Is it you...? I mean, you know, hidden under all the sheet and towels in here... I can't just stand here and, you know, indefinitely...

Belinda tells Poppy to read in Brooke's part from the book.

Belinda hands the flowers to Frederick and runs off to the dressing-rooms, still holding the axe.

Poppy (reading) Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark! With all black sheets and things!

-----

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

Vicki Why did /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.

Roger I didn't lock the door! Vicki Someone locked the door!-

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

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

Vicki Like what? -

Vicki OK, I'll take it off. -

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

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

Exit Roger into the bedroom.

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

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

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

Garry stands half on and half off, waiting for Brooke. --

At the sight of Brooke, Lloyd abandons Poppy, and instead urges Brooke upstairs.

Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the hot water bottle. He looks up and down the landing.
for the next scene, for which she is now late.

Garry improvises. ----------------------------

Brooke makes her entrance through the linen cupboard door...

... and starts to play the previous scene that she missed. -------------------------------

Lloyd despairs at Brooke's inflexibility. Dotty asks Lloyd if the flowers are really for her. He pushes them back to her absently. Dotty is very touched. She gives Lloyd a grateful kiss...

... just as Garry appears to see it.

----- Vicki Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark! With all black sheets and things!

----- Roger Someone in the bathroom, filling hot water bottles... What?

----- Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom

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

----- Roger (off) Don't panic! Don't panic!

Enter Roger, and goes downstairs.

There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this. I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening. You wait here... You can't stand here looking like that... Wait in the study... Study, study, study!
Poppy desperately turns over the pages of the book to find the new place, while everyone looks over her shoulder.

Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms, leading Selsdon, who is holding his trousers up. Tim is holding the whisky, and the axe embedded in a shattered section of the door of the Gents. He hands the whisky to Frederick.

Frederick roars ------------------------------- and goes to make his entrance, then realises that he is holding the whisky instead of his props.

Frederick gives a cry of alarm, claps his hand over his mouth, then realises he was suppose to give a cry anyway, drops the whisky under the chairs, grabs his props, and...

... makes his entrance.
---------------------------

Tim gives the axe to Lloyd and snatches the flowers from Dotty, who snatches them right back, leaving Tim

Exit Roger into the service quarters

Vicki opens the study door.

----- There's a roar of exasperation from Philip, off. She turns and flees

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

There is another cry from Philip, off

Exit Vicki blindly through the front door

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

Philip Darling, I know this is going to
Noises Off, Act Two page 52

with only one. He hands this to Lloyd, who hands it to Brooke. She peers at it as it keels sadly over, then hurls it on to the floor and runs out to the dressing-rooms.

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

Lloyd gives more money to Tim, who puts his raincoat on and exits wearily to the dressing-rooms.

Selsdon explains to everyone where he innocently was by a show of pulling a chain. The demonstration causes his trousers to fall down. Selsdon stoops to retrieve his fallen trousers, and sees the whisky that Frederick concealed beneath the chairs. He picks it up, and Lloyd snatches it out of his hand.
Noises Off, Act Two page 53

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.

Frederick exits
-------------------------------
and sees that Selsdon is otherwise occupied.

Frederick repeats the cue
-------------
and slams the door again.

They all suddenly realise that this is Selsdon's cue. They rush him to the window. He raises his arms to open the window and his trousers fall down.

They bundle him on as best they can.
-----
They watch him. Then Garry snatches the flowers from Dotty, and hurls them on the floor. Frederick reproachfully picks them up, and hands them back to Dotty.

Garry grabs the axe from Lloyd and advances upon Frederick. Dotty hands the flowers to Belinda so as to be able to throw her arms protectively round Frederick. Belinda dumps the flowers on Poppy's desk so as to be able to snatch Frederick away from Dotty. Dotty snatches him back. They snatch him back and forth, like two dogs with a bone, then

Philip  But this is ridiculous.

Exit Philip into the downstairs bathroom

----- The window opens, and through it appears an elderly Burglar.

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

He climbs in

No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I
push him aside and face up to each other. Dotty grabs the axe from Garry to use on Belinda. But they are distracted because...

doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags! So what are they offering? (He peers at the television) One microwave oven.

He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa


He inspects the paintings and ornaments

Junk ... Junk ... if you insist...

He pockets some small item

Where's his desk? No, they all say the same thing...
Selsdon appears at the front door.  

-----  He opens the front door to get a prompt.

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

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

Selsdon  Hard to what?

Omnes  (shouting)  'Adjust to retirement!'

Selsdon goes back  
on.--------------------------

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

Selsdon makes his exit.  

--------------------------  

-----  Exit Burglar into the study.

Dotty is about to resume her attack upon Belinda when she realises that Garry is already making his entrance.  

--------------------------  

-----  Enter Roger from the service quarters..Roger  ...  And the prospective tenant naturally wishes to know if there is any previous history of paranormal phenomena.

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

-----  Enter Mrs Clackett, holding another plate of sardines
Mrs Clackett Oh, yes, dear, it's all nice and paranormal.

Roger I mean, has anything ever dematerialized before? Has anything ever flown about?

He sees the television set on the sofa.

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

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

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

He opens the study door and then closes it again.

There's a man in there!

Mrs Clackett No, no, there's no one in the house, love.
Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms with a third, very small bunch of flowers. He gives them to Lloyd, but Belinda shows Lloyd Selsdon concealing the whisky about his person, and Lloyd goes to deal with him, then comes back to give Belinda the flowers so as to leave his hands free. Selsdon quickly conceals the whisky in the fire-bucket.
Roger (opening the study door) Look! Look! Lloyd searches Selsdon

Selsdon demonstrates that his hands are empty.

Belinda hands the axe to Tim and gives Lloyd a grateful kiss for the flowers.

Enter Frederick triumphantly from the dressing-rooms, bringing a reluctant Brooke back, still in her overcoat and carrying the holdall.

She reluctantly starts to take the overcoat off, then peers at the spectacle of Belinda, with flowers, kissing Lloyd.

Tim, seeing this as he takes his raincoat off, puts the raincoat back on again, hands the axe to Lloyd, and wearily holds out his hand for money.

Lloyd wearily hands the axe to Frederick and gives Tim his last small change.

Exit Tim to the dressing-rooms.

Belinda suddenly realises that her

----- He's... searching for something.

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

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

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

Oh my God.

Mrs Clackett Now what?

Roger There!

Mrs Clackett Where?

Roger The sardines!

Mrs Clackett Oh, the sardines.

Roger You can see the sardines.

Mrs Clackett I can see the sardines.

Roger touches them cautiously, then
flowers are attracting jealous attention, and puts them on Poppy's table with the other flowers.

Brooke is amazed and even more upset to see that the flowers are in fact for Poppy. She puts her overcoat back on and turns to walk out again.

Lloyd stops her, and looks desperately round for some other token of his affection to give her instead of the flowers.

Frederick, tidily putting the axe back on the firepoint, finds the whisky in the fire-bucket and holds it aloft - another bottle!

Selsdon takes the bottle from Frederick, but Lloyd takes it from Selsdon in time for...

... Selsdon to make his entrance.

----- Enter Burglar from the study, carrying an armful of silver cups, etc.

Lloyd gives the whisky to Brooke, kisses her, and tries to persuade her out of her overcoat while she peers at the bottle.

Burglar No, I miss the violence. I miss having other human beings around to terrify.
Frederick takes the whisky out of Brooke’s hands.

Lloyd takes it back and hands it to Brooke. Frederick takes it away again to show it to Dotty, turning her round to show her that it came from the fire-bucket, just as....

... Garry makes his exit and sees Dotty now apparently being hugged by Frederick

Garry leans down from the platform and tips the plate of sardines he is carrying over Dotty’s head. Everyone, even Brooke, half in and half out of her coat, watches, hands helplessly upraised.

Garry makes his entrance.

Dotty puts the whisky down on the steps to deal with the sardines on her head.

He dumps the silverware on the sofa, and exits into the study

Enter Roger from mezzanine bathroom

Roger Where’s she gone? Vicki?

----- Exit Roger into the linen cupboard

Enter Burglar from the study, carrying Philip’s box and bag. He empties the contents of the box out behind the sofa, and loads the silverware into the box

Burglar It’s nice to hear a bit of shouting and screaming around you. All this silence gets you down.

----- Enter Roger from the linen cupboard, still holding the sardines

Roger (calls) Vicki! Vicki!
Garry makes his exit

--- Exit Roger into the bedroom

then picks up the whisky and takes a swig, very pleased with himself.

**Burglar** I'm going to end up talking to myself...

While Garry stands on the platform with his head back, Dotty climbs on a chair and ties his shoelaces together.

**Exit the Burglar into study, unaware of Roger**

Everyone, even Brooke, watches, horrified.

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!

Lloyd tries to warn Garry. Garry brushes him aside because he has an entrance coming up.

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!

Garry puts the whisky down and...

... makes his entrance

----- Enter Roger from the bedroom, still holding the sardines

falling headlong over his feet.
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.

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*
They all wait for the crash.  

hand, then sees the tax demand on it, and hurriedly puts it away behind his back

I mean, have a sardine.

He offers the sardines on his left hand. His trousers, unsupported, fall down

Roger No, you're not! You're some kind of sex maniac! You've done something to Vicki! I'm going to come straight downstairs...

The sound of Garry falling downstairs

----- Roger falls downstairs.

Even Selsdon can hear it.

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

Frederick, on stage, improvises a line.

----- Frederick Are you all right?

No reply.

Belinda turns to Dotty in horror - she's killed him! Belinda opens the study door to go to Garry. Lloyd restrains her.
At the sound of Garry’s voice  
------------ they all relax.

Lloyd takes another swig of whisky.

Frederick makes his exit  
-----------------------
trousers round his ankles,  
handkerchief pressed to his nose. He looks into his handkerchief, and comes over faint. Belinda and Dotty catch him.

Lloyd remembers that Brooke has an entrance coming up. He attempts to peel the overcoat off her.

Brooke, recoiling from this, reverses into Belinda and Dotty, staggering under the weight of Frderick, and loses her lenses.

Belinda and Dotty drop Frederick and turn to deal with this next problem.

Garry repeats the cue. -----------------------

----- Roger  (faintly) This is plainly a matter for the police.  (Into the phone) Police!

Philip I think I'll be running along.

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

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

----- And what's happened to her no one knows!

----- No one knows!
Belinda, Dotty, and Lloyd guide Brooke, blinded and confused, and still wearing her overcoat, to the window for her entrance, cracking her head against the set on the way.

----- Enter Vicki through the window.

Vicki There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

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

Vicki No, he almost saw me!

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

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

Roger (into the phone) So what am I saying? I'm saying, let's say no more about it. (He puts the phone down) Well, put something on!

Vicki I haven't got anything!

Roger There must be something in the bathroom! He picks up the box and bag and leads the way.

Bring the sardines!

She picks up the sardines.

Garry comes hobbling and raging off,----- his shoes still tied today. He gazes in amazement at the sight of Dotty and Selsdon.

----- Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the downstairs bathroom
Garry repeats the cue. ---------------------

Lloyd realises, and rushes Selsdon on, as Frederick loads him with props. 

Garry moves to commit violence upon everyone in sight, but the state of his shoes prevents him from getting more than a step or two before he has to return...

----- Bring the sardines!

----- Enter the Burglar from the study, and dumps more booty.

----- 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

----- Exit Garry into the mezzanine bathroom 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.*

----- *Enter Philip through the front door*

*Philip* Darling! Help! Where are you?

*Brooke blindly makes her entrance.*

----- *Enter Vicki from the the mezzanine bathroom*

*Vicki* Roger! Roger!

*Exit Philip hurriedly, unseen by Vicki, into the downstairs bathroom*

*Lloyd takes over the search of Dotty's clothing. Garry gazes in astonishment.*

There's someone in the bathroom now!

*Vicki runs towards the bedrooms, then stops.*

----- *Flavia (off)* Oh, darling, I'm finding such lovely things!

*Vicki turns and runs downstairs instead, as Flavia enters along the upstairs corridor, absorbed in the china tea service she is carrying.*

*Vicki exits hurriedly into the downstairs bathroom*

Do you remember this china tea service -

----- *Vicki screams, off*

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

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

Who are you?

*Vicki* Oh no - it's his wife and dependents!

*She puts her hands over her face*

*Enter Philip from the downstairs*
bathroom, still with his hands encumbered, holding the bathmat now as well, and keeping his trousers up with his elbows

**Philip** Excuse me, I think you've dropped your dress.

**Flavia** gasps. **Philip** looks up at the gallery and sees her

(To **Flavia**) Where have you been? I've been going mad! Look at the state I'm in!

He holds up his hands to show Flavia the state he is in, and his trousers fall down. The tea service slips from Flavia's horrified hands, and rains down on the floor of the living-room below. **Philip** hurries towards the stairs, trousers round his ankles, his hands extended in supplication.

**Philip** Darling, honestly!

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

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

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

----- Enter **Roger** from the bedroom, directly in **Philip**'s path

**Philip** holds up the bathmat in front of his face. He is invisible to **Roger**, though, because the latter is holding up a white bedsheet. **Roger** Here, put this sheet on for the moment while I see if there's something in the attic.

----- **Roger** leaves **Philip** with the sheet
and also watches the scene below in amazement. So does Belinda.

Garry hobbles downstairs and takes the cactus from Brooke for use against Lloyd again.

Tim warns Lloyd about Garry.

Lloyd quickly pulls up his trousers.

Tim takes the cactus from Garry. Garry snatches it back, then has to hand it back to Tim anyway so that he can grab Vicki’s dress from its hook and...

and exits along upstairs corridor

Philip turns to go back downstairs.

Enter Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom, holding two gold taps

Burglar One pair gold taps...

He stops at the sight of Philip

Oh, my Gawd!

Philip Who are you?

Burglar Me? Fixing the taps.

Philip Tax? Income tax?

Burglar That’s right, governor. In come new taps ... out go old taps.

Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom

Philip Tax-inspectors everywhere!

Roger (off) Here you are!

Philip The other one!

Exit Philip into the bedroom, holding the bathmat in front of his face

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

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

----- Exit Roger into mezzanine bathroom

Enter Philip from the bedroom, trying to pull the bathmat off his head

Philip Darling! I've got her dress stuck to my head now!
Frederick makes his exit ------------------------- and picks up the bedsheets which are waiting for him and Brooke to put on. He flaps them at Brooke to remind her about her change. Lloyd points out the flapping sheets to her, but she puts the overcoat back on to storm out again. Lloyd retains her desperately while he takes the cactus from Tim and gives it to her as a token of his enduring affection. She peers at it, and he takes in the nature of the present for the first time himself. He turns in pained query to Tim, who gestures that it was all the shop had left - all the rest of their stock is now on Poppy's desk.

Lloyd takes the cactus back and kisses it, with painful results, to present to Brooke again. Frederick flaps the sheets in desperation.

Brooke hesitates. Finally she takes off her overcoat runs up the steps with the cactus.

Roger makes his exit ------------------------- and waits for him and Brooke to put on. He flaps them at Brooke to remind her about her change.

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

Selsdon makes his exit. -------------------------

----- Exit Burglar into the mezzanine
Brooke pushes the cactus into Selsdon's hands as she passes.

There is a swirl of sheets as Frederick attempts to dress Brooke in time for her entrance.

Frederick and Brooke make their separate entrances and discover that they are unable to because their sheets are attached to each other.

Belinda, upstairs for her entrance, goes to disentangle them. So does Selsdon, but he and the cactus together makes things worse.

Frederick and Brooke are half on and half off Garry watches with pleasure, until Lloyd furiously drives him...

... on stage to hold the fort. 

Garry improvises

Tim takes off his raincoat and starts to put on the spare sheet to go on as Frederick's double. Lloyd rips it off him again, and gestures that it's needed as an emergency substitute for Frederick's sheet. They pass to the sheet to Frederick, but he is too entangled to do anything with it.

Belinda gestures desperately to Lloyd for the real Sheikh's robes. Lloyd passes them up to Belinda, who hands them to Frederick...

... who is dragged on through the linen cupboard door by Brooke, still holding the second sheet and the real Sheikh's robes. Flavia takes the cactus away from Selsdon, then hurriedly hands it down to Lloyd so that...


bathroom

Roger Vicki ... ?

Exit Roger through the front door

----- Philip attempts to enter from the bathroom.

----- Vicki attempts to enter from the linen cupboard.

----- Enter Roger through the front door

----- Roger No sheikh yet! I thought he was coming at four? I mean, it's nearly, you know, four now... Well, it's after three... Because I've been standing here for a good, you know, it seems like forever... What's the time now. It must be getting on for five...

... who is dragged on through the linen cupboard door by Brooke, still holding the second sheet and the real Sheikh's robes. Flavia takes the cactus away from Selsdon, then hurriedly hands it down to Lloyd so that...

----- Oh, you're here already, hiding in the, anyway... And this is your charming wife? So you want to see over the house now, do you, Sheikh? Right. Well. Since you're upstairs already -

Roger goes upstairs
... she can make her entrance. --------------

Lloyd puts the cactus in a safe place on the chairs downstairs.

Tim puts on the bathmat as burnous, to go on as Philip's double, but gestures to Lloyd that he now has no sheet to wear, because it has vanished on stage with Frederick.

They both register despair.

Lloyd takes a despairing pull of whisky.

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

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

Roger, Philip and Vicki go downstairs

Roger  (to Philip and Vicki) I'm sorry about this. I don't know who she is. No connection with the house, I assure you.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, with another plate of sardines. Roger advances to introduce her

Mrs Clackett  No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines, 'cause this time I'm eating them.

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

He opens the door to the mezzanine bathroom

But in here...

Flavia  Arab sheets?

----- Exit Flavia into the bedroom

Roger  In here we have...

Enter the Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom

Burglar  Ballcocks, governor. Your ballcocks have gone.

Roger  We have him. Enter Flavia from the bedroom

Mrs Clackett  You give me that sheet, you devil!

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.
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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.

Frederick makes his exit ---------------------

dragging Brooke backwards with him,

since they are still attached to each other.

Flavia comes downstairs menacingly

Frederick makes his exit ---------------------

dragging Brooke backwards with him,

since they are still attached to each other.

Selsdon improvises a line. --------------------

Brooke struggles back on

------------------------as best she can.

Tim makes his entrance in back-to-front

raincoat. -----------------------------------

Frederick has picked up the real burnous,

and flaps it in desperation as he realises

that the robes are still somewhere onstage.

All Lloyd can find now as a substitute is

Brooke's leopard-skin overcoat.  He spins

Frederick round to put it on him back to

front, as he did with Tim and the raincoat.

He then crams the burnous on Frederick's

head, but Frederick has continued to turn,

so it hangs over his face instead of his

neck.  Lloyd crams the Sheikh's dark

glasses on top of the burnous...

----- Burglar  It's my little girl!  So far as I

could see before she went.

----- Vicki  Dad!

Burglar  Our little Vicki, that ran away

from home, I thought I'd never see again!

Flavia  (threateningly) So where's my

other sheet?

... and Frederick stumbles blindly

back on stage.

----------------------------------------

Lloyd picks up the whisky, takes a

weary swig, and is just about to sit

down on the cactus when he springs

----- 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!
up again guiltily, because Poppy is standing agitatedly in front of him. She takes the whisky away from him and puts it down, desperate to secure his full attention. She whispers urgently to him. He can't understand. She whispers again, becoming more and more agitated. He puts a hand to his ear, meaning he can't hear.

They all fall upon him, and reveal that his trousers are around his ankles.

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

Vicki What's that, Dad?

Burglar When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a...

He dries.

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

Selsdon flings the front door open.

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

Poppy ... baby!

Everyone on stage gasps. Their heads flick round, then back again.

Selsdon A good old-fashioned plate of gravy!

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,------------------------

------------------------ CURTAIN
Everyone appears in the doors and windows, eager to know more. Lloyd subsides, defeated, on to the cactus, and springs up again in agony.

CURTAIN.
ACT III

The curtain goes up to reveal the tabs of the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees. A half-empty whisky bottle
nestles at the foot of them. The introductory music for
Nothing On.

As the music finishes the tabs begin to rise. A foot or
two above stage level they stop uncertainly, hover for a
moment, and fall again.

Pause.

The introductory music starts again, and is then faded
out.

Enter Tim from the wings, in his dinner jacket, but with
elements of the Burglar's gear visible beneath it, and
the Burglar's cap on his head.

Tim Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

He removes the Burglar's cap.

Welcome to the the Old Fishmarket Theatre, Lowestoft, or
rather the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees, for this
evening's performance of Nothing On. We apologise for the
slight delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances...

Belinda (off, screaming but indistinguishable) Hands off Freddie! All
right?
Dotty  *(off, screaming but indistinguishable)* You're the one who's trying to get their hands on Freddie!

Tim  ... due to circumstances...

Dotty  *(off, screaming but indistinguishable)* You don't own him, you know!

Tim  ... beyond our control...

*The sound of a slap, off, and Dotty screams in pain, off.*

... and we would ask you to bear with us for a moment while we deal with her. With them. With the circumstances. I should perhaps say with tonight's performance of the play our long and highly successful tour...

Poppy  *(over Tannoy)* Ladies and gentlemen. We apologise for the delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances which have...

Belinda  *(over Tannoy)* Don't you dare! Don't you dare!

Poppy  *(over Tannoy)* ... which have now been brought under control.

Tim  ... our long and highly successful tour is on its very last legs. Its very last leg. Thank you for your...

Poppy  Thank you for your...

Tim & Poppy  *(together)* ... co-operation and understanding.
Tim I sincerely trust...

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

I sincerely trust there will be no other...

He becomes aware of the whisky bottle.

... no other hiccups. No other holdups. So, ladies and gentlemen, will you please sit back and enjoy the remains of the evening.

Exit Tim. A slight pause, then his arm comes out from under the tabs and retrieves the bottle.

The introductory music for Nothing On, and this time the tabs rise. The act is being seen from the front again, exactly as it was the first time, at the rehearsal in Weston-super-Mare

Enter slowly and with dignity from the service quarters, limping painfully, Mrs Clackett. She is holding a plate in her left hand and a handful of loose sardines in her right.

Mrs Clackett (bravely) It's no good you going on...

She stops and looks at the phone. It hurriedly starts to ring.

I can't pick sardines off the floor and answer the phone.
She dumps the handful of sardines on the plate.

I've only got one leg.

She shifts the plate to her right hand and picks up the phone with the left.

(Into the phone, bravely) Hello... Yes, but there's no one here...
No, Mr Brent's not here...

She puts the plate of sardines newspaper down next to the newspaper on the sofa as she speaks and picks up the newspaper. She shakes the outer sheet free and wipes her oily hand on it as best she can. The rest of the newspaper disintegrates and falls back on top of the sardines.

He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain. Mr Philip Brent, that's right... The one who writes the plays, only why he wants to get mixed up in plays God only knows, he'd be safer off in the lion's cage at the zoo... No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here... Am I in Spain...?

She realises that she is holding the sheet of newspaper instead of the sardines. She turns round to look for them as she speaks, winding herself into the telephone cord.

No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with...

She sits down uncertainly on the heap of newspaper.

... because it's the royal what's it called on the telly - the royal
you know...

She realises that she is sitting on the sardines, and extracts the plate as discreetly as possible as she speaks.

... And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house-agents, because they're the agents for the house... Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one...?

She examines the flattened contents of the plate.

No, they're not in Spain, they're just a bit squashed. Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on...

She stands up to go, uncertainly balancing plate, sheet of newspaper, and phone.

... I'm going to do something wrong here.

She starts to go, then realises there are loose sheets of newspaper all over the floor, and bends down to picks them up. The sardines slide off the plate on to the floor.

Always the same, isn't it.

She starts to go again.

One minute you've got too much on your plate...

She realises that she has nothing on her plate, turns round and sees the sardines.
... next thing you know they've gone again.

She uncertainly drops a few sheets of the newspaper over the sardines and exits into the study, holding the empty plate and the telephone receiver. The body of the phone falls off its table and follows her to the door.

The sound of a key in the lock. The front door opens. On the doorstep is Roger, carrying a cardboard box.

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

Enter Vicki

The body of the phone begins to creep inconspicuously towards the door.

So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

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

I'll just check.

He halts the telephone with a casually placed foot. Vicki gazes round

Hello? Anyone at home? No, there's no one here.

He picks the phone up, and puts it back on its table.
So what do you think?

*He takes his hand off the phone, and it springs back on to the floor*

**Vicki** Great. And this is all yours?

*The phone starts to creep away again. Roger casually picks it up as he talks and puts it down on the sideboard*


**Vicki** It must have cost a bomb.

*Another jerk on the wire catapults the phone across the room. Vicki pays no attention to it*

**Roger** Well, one has to have somewhere to entertain one's business associates. Someone on the phone now, by the look of it.

*He picks the phone up and puts it back on the sideboard*

It's probably this, you know, this Arab saying he wants to come at four, so I mean I'll just have a word with him and...

*He tries to pick up the receiver and finds that it's not there. As the conversation continues he follows the receiver cord along with his hand*

**Vicki** Right, and I've got to get those files to our Basingstoke office
by four.

**Roger**  Yes, we'll only just manage to pick it in. I mean, we'll only just fit it up. I mean...

**Vicki**  Right, then.

**Roger**  We won't bother to pull the champagne.

*He pulls gently at the cord*

**Vicki**  All these doors!

**Roger**  Oh, only a handful, really. Study... Kitchen... and a self-contained service flat...

*He tugs hard, and the cord comes away without the receiver*

... for the receiver.

**Vicki**  Terrific. And which one's the... ?

**Roger**  What?

**Vicki**  You know...

**Roger**  The usual offices? Through here, through here.

*He bundles up the phone and cable, and opens the downstairs bathroom door for her*
Vicki  Fantastic.

   Exit Vicki into the bathroom. Roger tosses the phone casually off after her

   Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, still walking with difficulty and holding the now cordless receiver.

Mrs Clackett  I've lost the sardines again...

   Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom

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

Mrs Clackett  I'm not here. *(She looks round for the phone, so that she can replace the receiver)* I don't know where I am.

Roger  I'm from the agents.

Mrs Clackett  Lost the phone now.

Roger  Squire, Squire, Hackham, and Dudley.

Mrs Clackett  Never lost a phone before.

Roger  I'm Tramplemain.

Mrs Clackett  I'll just put it up here, look, if anyone wants it.

   *She puts the receiver on top of the television.*

Roger  Oh, right, thanks. No, I just dropped in to... go into a few
things...

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it. Mrs Clackett gets down on her hands and knees and looks under the newspaper.*

Well, to check some of the measurements...

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it. Mrs Clackett goes to scoop up the sardines, but then looks round.*

Do one or two odd jobs...

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.*

**Mrs Clackett**

Now the plate's gone.

**Roger**

Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective client over the house.

*The bathroom door opens.*

**Vicki**

What's wrong with this door?

*Roger closes it.*

**Roger**

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

*Enter Vicki from the bathroom*

**Vicki**

That's not the bedroom.
Roger  The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the...

*Roger steps forward on to the newspapers to introduce Mrs Clackett. His foot slides away in front of him.*

Mrs Clackett  Sardines, dear, sardines.

Vicki  Oh. Hi.

Roger  She's not really here.

Mrs Clackett  *(looking under the newspaper)* Oh, you shouldn't have stood on them.

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

Mrs Clackett  They'll all go standing on them now.

Roger  We'll just inspect the house.

Mrs Clackett  I'd better give the floor a wash.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, leaving the sardines beneath the newspaper on the floor*

Roger  I'm sorry about this.

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

Roger  Television? That's right, television, she didn't explain about wanting to watch this royal, you know, because obviously
there's been this thing with the...  *(He indicates the sardines.)*
I mean, I'm just, you know, in case anyone's looking at all this and thinking, 'My God!'

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

**Roger**
Sorry, love. I thought we ought to get that straight.

**Vicki**
We'll take it up with us.

**Roger**
Where are we?

**Vicki**
And don't let my files out of sight.

**Roger**
Hold on. We've got out of...

**Vicki**
What?

**Roger**
What?

**Vicki**
Her?

**Roger**
Her? OK...'her'. Right, because she *has* been in the family for generations.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, carrying a fire-bucket and a mop.*
Mrs Clackett  
Sardines... Sardines... It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it - take the plunge...

*She plunges the mop into the fire-bucket.*

You'll really enjoy it here...

*She discovers that the mop won't go into the fire-bucket.*

Vicki  
Oh. Great.

*Mrs Clackett removes the obstruction - a bottle of whisky.*

Mrs Clackett  
I'll put it here, look, then if he wants it he won't know where to find it...

*Mrs Clackett puts the bottle of whisky with the other bottles on the sideboard*

Vicki  
Terrific.

Mrs Clackett  
Sardines, sardines.

*She hands the mop to Roger.*

You'll have to do the sardines, then, 'cause I've got to go back to the kitchen now and do some more sardines.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to service quarters*
Vicki  You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

Roger  *(contemplates the bucket and mop uncertainly)* Well...

Vicki  I think she's terrific.

Roger  Terrific.

Vicki  So which way?

Roger  I don't know - kind of parcel them up in the... *(He holds out some sheets of newspaper to her.)* And I'll... *(He demonstrates the mop.)*

Vicki  *(Starts up the stairs.)* Up here?

Roger  Down here!

Vicki  In here?

Roger  OK, I'll do the... you do the...

*Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom. Roger parcels up the sardines in the newspaper as best he can*

Vicki  It's another bathroom.

*She reappears*

*Roger dumps the parcel of sardines on the telephone*
table while he dabs hurriedly at the floor with the mop.

Roger  Take the box upstairs, then! Take the bag!

Vicki  Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

Roger  Bag! Box!

Vicki  Oh, black sheets!

Roger  *(runs to the stairs with bucket and mop, and holds them out to Vicki)* All right, take the... take the... take the...!

Vicki  Oh, you're in a real state!

Roger  *(despairingly)* Oh...!

Roger runs back and abandons the bucket and mop to pick up the bag and box.

Vicki  You can't even get the door open.

Exit Vicki into the bedroom

Roger runs back to collect the bucket and mop, just as the front door opens to reveal Philip, carrying a cardboard box.

Philip  No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember. We've got the place...
Philip freezes, as Roger flees upstairs with the bag and the box. Philip follows Roger's progress out of the corner of his eye.

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

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

... entirely to ourselves.

Flavia Home.

Philip Home, sweet home.

Flavia Dear old house!

Philip Just waiting for us to come back!

Flavia (producing the remains of the phone) But how odd to find the telephone in the garden!

Philip I'll put it back.

She hands him the phone - now in a very deteriorated condition - and he attempts to replace it on the telephone table. But it is still connected to its lead, which is too short, since it runs out through the downstairs bathroom door, and back in through the front door.
Flavia: I thought I'd better bring it in.

Philip: Very sensible.

_He tugs discreetly at the lead_

Flavia: Someone's bound to want it.

Philip: Oh dear. *(He tugs)*

Flavia: Why don't you put it back on the table?

Philip: The wire seems to be caught.

Flavia: Oh, look, it's caught round the downstairs bathroom.

Philip: So it is.

*Philip takes the phone back out of the front room.*

*Flavia with discreet violence pulls the lead out of the junction-box where it originates. Philip re-emerges with the phone through the downstairs bathroom*

Flavia: I think I've disentangled it.

Philip: I climbed through the bathroom window and... oh... oh...

_He takes the parcel of sardines off the telephone table and puts the telephone in its place_

Flavia: It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!
Philip

It's damned serious! If Inland Revenue find out we're in the...

*Attempting to fold up the newspaper tidily, he becomes distracted by the contents that come oozing out over his hands. His voice dies away.*

Flavia

... country, even for one night...

Philip

Sorry.

*He puts down the parcel of sardines on the sofa.*

Yes, because if Inland Revenue find out we're in the...

*He moves towards the champagne, and slides, exactly like Garry, on the oily patch on the floor. He stops and looks back on it in surprise.*

Flavia

... country...

Philip

(distracted) ... country...

Flavia

... even for one night.

Philip

... even for one night...

*Philip edges cautiously away from the oily patch.*

Flavia

... bang goes...

*He bangs into the bucket and mop.*

... our claim to be resident abroad...

*Philip fumbles for his handkerchief, and claps it to his nose.*

Philip

Resident abroad. Absolutely. *(He looks into his handkerchief.)*

Flavia

Bang goes most of this year's income.

Philip

Most of this year's income... *(He puts the handkerchief away.) So, yes, I think I'd better...*(He picks up bag and box, clutches them to himself for reassurance.) ... go and have a little lie-down.*
He starts up the stairs.

Flavia  *(surprised, but rallying)*  Lie-down, yes, well, why not? No children. No friends dropping in...

*She moves the sofa to cover the oily patch as she speaks.*

We're absolutely on our... Leave those!

Philip  Oh, yes.

*Philip puts the bag and box down, but by this time he is already upstairs*

Flavia  Downstairs! Not upstairs!

Philip  I'm so sorry. I...

*He looks in his handkerchief again.*

Oh dear...

*He exits hurriedly into bedroom.*

Flavia  *(picks up the fire-bucket and mop)*  There is something to be said for being a tax exile...

*She flees upstairs with the fire-bucket and mop, laughing.*

Sh...! What? Inland Revenue may hear us!

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

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

*She puts down the plate of sardines, and goes to sit on*
the sofa, on the parcel of sardines left there by Philip

Flavia (urgently, looking down from the gallery, still holding the bucket and mop) Mrs Newspaper!

Mrs Clackett jumps up.

Mrs Clackett Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of the sofa!

Flavia So did mine! We thought you'd gone!

Mrs Clackett (finding the parcel of sardines and examining it) I thought you was in Sardinia!

Flavia We are! We are! You haven't seen us! We're not here!

Mrs Clackett I can guess which one of them put this here.

Flavia Yes, but the main thing is that the income tax are after us.

Mrs Clackett Lovely helping of sardines to sit on.

Flavia So if anybody asks for us, you don't know nothing. Anything. So I'll just... I'll just... get a hot water bottle.

She goes towards the mezzanine bathroom.

Mrs Clackett And off she goes without waiting to find out about his letters.

Flavia (stops, realises despairingly) His letters?

Enter Philip groggily from the bedroom.
Philip

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

Mrs Clackett

Not presents from Sardinia, dear.

Philip

I'm so sorry.

*Exit Philip into the bedroom.*

Mrs Clackett

I'll show you where I put presents from Sardinia.

*She goes upstairs towards Flavia, who is still outside the mezzanine bathroom, carrying the bucket and mop, not sure which way to move.*

I put presents from Sardinia in the pigeonhouse.

Flavia

In the *pigeonhouse?*

Mrs Clackett

In the little pigeonhouse down here, love.

*She stuffs the parcel of sardines down the front of Flavia's dress. Flavia looks down at the dress, then at the fire-bucket and mop she is carrying. Mrs Clackett retires hurriedly back downstairs, and exits into the study, with Flavia after her.*

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, but with no tie on*

Roger

Yes, but I could hear voices!
He falls over Philip’s bag and box

Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear

Vicki  Voices? What sort of voices?

Roger  Box voices. I mean, people’s boxes.

Vicki  But there’s no one here.

Roger  Darling, I saw the door-handle move! And these bags... I’m not sure they were, you know, when we went into the, do you know what I mean?

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

Roger  (picking up the bag and box) Because if someone left these things outside the, I mean, come on, they obviously want them downstairs inside the, you know.

Vicki  Mrs Clockett?

Roger  It could be. Coming up here on her way to, well, carrying various, I mean, who knows?

Vicki  (looking over the banisters) Oh look, she’s opened our sardines.

She moves to go downstairs. Roger puts down the bag and box outside the linen cupboard and grabs her

Roger  Come back!
Vicki  What?

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

Vicki  Why not?

Roger  Mrs Crackett.

Vicki  Mrs Crackett?

Roger  One has certain obligations.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, fishing sardines out of the front of her dress.

Mrs Clackett  (to herself) Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like the Battle of Waterloo out there.

Roger tries to pull open the linen cupboard door to conceal Vicki, but it is obstructed by the bag and box

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

Roger  Yes, still poking, well, still pulling.

He tugs at the door again, unaware of the obstruction, and the handle comes off as it opens.

Mrs Clackett  Good job I can't see far with this leg.

Roger moves the bag and box, gets Vicki inside the
linen cupboard, and rebalances the handle in place

Roger Just, you know, trying all the doors and I mean checking all the doorhandles.

He starts downstairs, carrying Philip's bag and box

Mrs Blackett.

Mrs Clackett Clackett, dear, Clackett.

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

Mrs Clackett I haven't seen no one, dear.

Roger I thought I heard a box. I mean, I found these voices.

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

Roger I must have imagined it.

Philip (off) Oh good Lord above!

The colossal sound of Philip falling downstairs, off,
taking half the platform with him, followed by a wailing groan.

Roger I beg your pardon?

Mrs Clackett (mimicking Philip) Oh good Lord above!

She crashes things about on the sideboard in imitation of the offstage crash, and ends the performance with a
wailing groan.

Roger  Why, what is it?

Mrs Clackett  The study door's open.

She crosses and closes the door

Roger  They're going to want these inside the... (He indicates the study) So I'll put them outside the... (He indicates the front door) Then they can, do you know what I mean?

Exit Roger through the front door, carrying the bag and box

Enter Flavia from the mezzanine bathroom, carrying a first-aid box. She sees the linen cupboard door swinging open as she passes, and pushes it shut, so that the latch closes. The handle comes off in her hand

Flavia  Nothing but flapping doors in this handle.

Exit Flavia into the bedroom, holding the first-aid box and the handle. Enter from the study Philip, holding a tax demand and its envelope. The part is now being played not by Frederick but by Tim

Philip/Tim  ... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint... proceedings in court...

Mrs Clackett  Oh my Lord, who are you?
Philip/Tim        I'm Philip.

Mrs Clackett  You're Philip? What happened to you?

Philip/Tim  Well, it's all got a bit slippery on the stairs out there.

Mrs Clackett  You haven't done himself an injury?

Philip/Tim  No. He's just a bit shaken. I'll be all right in a minute.

         Exit Mrs Clackett to the study

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

Mrs Clackett  (off) What?

Philip/Tim  You weren't going to tell me a gentleman had come about the house?

         Enter Mrs Clackett from the study

Mrs Clackett  That's right. A gentleman come about the house.

Philip/Tim  Don't tell me. I'm not here.

Mrs Clackett  Oh, and he's put your box out in the garden for you.

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

Mrs Clackett  So I'll just sit down and turn on the... sardines, I've forgotten the sardines! (She finds the second plate of sardines on the
"table, exactly where she put it.

Oh, no, I haven't - I've remembered the sardines! What a surprise! I must go out to the kitchen and make another plate of sardines to celebrate.

Exit Mrs Clackett to the service quarters

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

Enter Flavia from the bedroom. She is holding the
dress that Vicki arrived in, and the handle of the linen
cupboard

Flavia Darling... (She stares at Philip/Tim in surprise, then recovers herself and looks at the dress) I never had a handle like this, did I?

Philip/Tim (abstracted) Didn't you?

Flavia I shouldn't buy anything as brassy as this.

Flavia drops the dress and attempts to replace the
handle on the linen cupboard behind her back

Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

Philip/Tim I should never have touched it.

Flavia No, it's lovely.

Exit Philip/Tim into study

**Flavia** Well, I'll put it in the attic, if anyone else wants to have a try.

*Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor, taking the handle but leaving the dress on the floor*

*Enter Roger through the front door, without the bag and box*

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

*He goes towards the study, and opens and closes the door. He reacts to the sound of urgent knocking overhead*

Knocking

*Knocking.

Upstairs!*

*He runs upstairs. Knocking*

Oh my God, there's something in the... *(He discovers the lack of a handle)* Oh my God! *(Knocking)* Listen! I can't, because the handle has, you know. You'll just have to...

*He demonstrates pushing. Knocking*

Come on! Come on!
Knocking

I mean, whatever it is in there. Can you hear me? Darling!

Knocking

Look, don't just keep banging! There's nothing I can, I mean it won't, there's nowhere to...

Knocking. He opens the bedroom door

Listen! Climb round into the... (He indicates the bedroom) Squeeze through the, youknow, and shin down the, I mean, there must be some way!

Knocking

Oh, for pity's sake!

Exit Roger into the bedroom

Enter Philip from the study, holding a tax demand and an envelope. He is now being played by Frederick, with a plaster on his head.

Philip

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

Enter Roger from the bedroom, pulling Vicki after him.

Philip gazes at them, baffled

Roger

Oh, it's you.
Vicki  Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark with all black sheets and things.

Roger  I put you in *there*, but you managed to squeeze through the, you know.

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

Roger  I couldn't, I mean, look, look, it's come off!

Vicki  *Someone* locked the door!

Philip  Sorry.

*Exit Philip apologetically into study*

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

Vicki  Like what?

Roger  I mean, you know, with people going in and out.

Vicki  OK, I'll take it off.

Roger  In here, in here!

*He ushers her into the bedroom*

*Enter Philip cautiously from the study, holding the tax demand and the envelope*
Philip  '... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint... proceedings in court...'

Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the first-aid box

He looks up and down the landing

Enter Vicki from the bedroom

Philip stares at them

Vicki  Now what?

Roger  A hot water box! 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

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

Exit Flavia into the bedroom

Philip raises his income tax demand to speak

Enter Roger and Vicki from the mezzanine bathroom

Roger What did you say?

Vicki I didn't say anything.

Exit Philip into the study

Roger I mean, first there's the door handle. Now there's the first water box.

Vicki I can feel goose-pimples all over.

Roger Yes, quick, get something round you.

Vicki Get the covers over our heads.

Roger is about to open the bedroom door

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

He goes downstairs. Vicki makes to follow
You - wait here.

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

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

**Vicki**  
What? What is it?

  
  *Roger looks round.*

What's happening?

**Roger**  
The sardines. They've gone. *(He double-takes on them)* No, they haven't. They're here. Oh. Well. My God... I mean... my God!

  
  *He turns and starts back upstairs*

  
  *Flavia crawls through the front door. She picks up the sardines and takes them back to the front door*

You put a plate of sardines down for two minutes, and the last thing you expect to find, I mean, these days, the one thing you don't expect to find when you come back is a plate of, I mean that's *really* weird!

**Vicki**  
Perhaps there is something funny going on. I'm going to get into bed and put my head under the ...
She freezes at the sight of the empty table outside the bedroom door

Roger: Because, I mean, there they are! Exactly where I ...

He realizes that the sardines are not there

Vicki: Bag ...

Roger goes back downstairs to investigate. Vicki runs after him. Flavia, unseen by Garry, hesitates. She glances up towards the landing, reminded by the mention of the bag that she has failed to set it. She looks back at the table, realising that Roger now expects the sardines to be on the table.

Roger: No, they're not. I suppose Mrs Sprockett must have, I mean, what *is* going on?

He looks at Vicki. Flavia hurriedly replaces the sardines.

Vicki: Bag!

Flavia exits hurriedly through the front door

Roger: Bag?

Vicki: Bag! Bag!

She drags Roger back upstairs
Roger  What do you mean, bag, bag?

*Roger looks over the banisters and sees the sardines*

Roger  Sardines!

Vicki  Bag! Bag! Bag!

Roger  Sardines! Sardines!

Vicki  Bag! Bag! Bag!

Roger  Sardines! Sardines!

Vicki  Bag! Bag! Bag!

*While Roger is gazing at the sardines, and Vicki is looking at Roger, the bedroom door opens, and Flavia puts the flight bag on the table outside*

Roger  *(tearing himself away from the sight of the sardines)* Bag? What bag?

Vicki  *(gazing at the bag)* No bag!

Roger  No bag?

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

Roger  It's in the bedroom. *(He sees the bag)* It was in the bedroom. I put it in the bedroom. I'll put it back in the bedroom.
As Roger goes to open the bedroom door it opens in front of him, and Flavia begins to come out carrying the box.

Vicki  Don't go in there!

Roger  The box!

Vicki  The box?

Roger  They've both not gone!

Vicki  Oh! My files!

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

He starts downstairs with the bag and box. Vicki follows him.

You wait in the bedroom.

Vicki  No! No! No!

She runs downstairs.

Roger  At least put your dress on!

Vicki  I'm not going in there!
Roger  I'll fetch it for you, I'll fetch it for you!

    He puts the bag and box down at the head of the stairs,  
    returns to the bedroom, and sees the dress on the floor

    Exit Roger into the bedroom

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

    Enter Roger from the bedroom

Roger  Your dress has gone.

    As he speaks he slides the dress over the edge of the  
    gallery with his foot to get rid of it. It falls on top of Vicki  
    beneath, and makes her jerk her head. She feels blindly  
    around her; her lenses have gone again.

Vicki  I'm never going to see Basingstoke again!

Roger  Don't panic! Don't panic! There's some perfectly rational  
    explanation for all this.

    He starts downstairs, looking over the banisters,  
    appalled at the sight of Vicki below, and falls headlong  
    over the bag and box at the top of the stairs

    Vicki searches blindly behind the sofa for her missing  
    lenses.

    Enter Philip from the study. He is holding the tax  
    demand and the envelope.
Philip ... final notice... steps will be taken... distraint...

His voice dies away at the sight of Roger lying at the bottom of the stairs

Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying further pieces of bric-a-brac

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

Philip (to Roger) Oh dear. *(He claps a handkerchief to his nose.)*

Flavia Oh great heavens!

*She rushes downstairs*

Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, holding another plate of sardines

Mrs Clackett No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines...

*She sees Roger.*

... 'cause this time she has, she's gone and killed him!

Flavia He's stunned, that's all. Keep going.

Roger *(lifting his head)* Don't panic! Don't panic!

Flavia He's all right! Just keep going!
Roger

There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this.

Mrs Clackett

Where are we?

Roger

I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening...

Mrs Clackett

You've fetched her. I'm here.

Roger

I've fetched Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening.

Mrs Clackett

She won't, you know.

Flavia

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!

\textit{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. \textit{(To Vicki)} So why don't you... why don't you... see what you can see in the garden?

\textit{She pushes Vicki out of the front door, and helps Philip to his feet.}

\textit{(to Philip)} And darling, you go off and get that bottle marked poison in the downstairs loo. That eats through anything.

Philip  \textit{(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.

\textit{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.

\textit{He climbs in, and looks round in surprise to find the}
room full of people

Mrs Clackett  Come in and join the party, love.

Flavia  A burglar! This is most exciting!

Philip  Oh dear, this is my fault. Because when I say, 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, this is ridiculous', and I open this door...

He opens the downstairs bathroom again. Another pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through

Enter through the window the Burglar, played by Selsdon

Burglar/Selsdon  No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

He climbs in, becoming uneasily aware of the others as he does so

Burglar/Tim  No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep.

Mrs Clackett  I know, love, it's getting like a funeral in here.

Burglar/Selsdon  When I think I used to do banks!

Flavia  Just keep going.

Burglar/Selsdon and
Burglar/Tim
(together) When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags ...

Flavia Keep going.

Burglar/Selsdon Stop?

Flavia No, no!

Burglar/Selsdon I thought the coast was clear, you see. I saw him going out to the bathroom.

Flavia (closing the downstairs bathroom door) Yes, never mind, it's all right. We'll think of something.

Burglar/Selsdon Oh, no, I was listening most carefully. What's it he says?

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

Burglar/ Selsdon And he opened the door ...

Burglar/Selsdon opens the downstairs bathroom door to demonstrate

A third pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through. Enter through the window the Burglar, played by Lloyd

Burglar/Lloyd No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.
He climbs in, very uncertain what's happening to him. He doesn't know whether to react to the presence of the others or not

Mrs Clackett  They always come in threes, don't they.

All 3 Burglars  When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults...

Flavia  Hold on! We know this man! He's not a burglar!

She snatches Lloyd's Burglar hat off.

He's our social worker!

Roger  He's what?

Flavia  He's that nice man who comes in and tells us what to do!

Lloyd  (appalled, faintly) What to do?

Others  (firmly) What to do!

Lloyd is paralysed with stage-fright. He looks round helplessly and makes vague and ineffectual gestures.

Selsdon  What's he saying?

Flavia  He's saying, he's saying - just get through it for doors and sardines! Yes? That's what it's all about! Doors and sardines! (To Lloyd) Yes?

Lloyd  (helplessly) Doors and sardines!

Others:  Doors and sardines!
They all try to put this into practice. Philip picks up the sardines and runs around trying to find some application for them. The others open various doors, fetch further plates of sardines, and run helplessly around with them. Lloyd stands helplessly watching the chaos he has created swirl around him.

**Flavia**  He's saying, he's saying - 'Phones and police'!

**Lloyd**  Phones and police...

**Philip**  Phone!

*Philip and Roger are each handed a half of the phone.*

**Roger**  Police!

*Roger puts the receiver to his ear. Philip dials.*

**Flavia**  He's saying 'Bags and boxes.'

**Others**  Bags and boxes!

*Everyone runs around with the two boxes and the two bags, all helplessly colliding with each other and running into the furniture.*

**Flavia**  *(decisively)*  Sheets, sheets! He's saying 'Sheets'!

**Lloyd**  Sheets...

**Others**  *(desperately)*  Sheets!

*Roger runs out of the study door, Tim out of the front door.*

**Flavia**  He's saying 'All we want now is a nice happy ending!'

*Roger comes back at once propelling the helpless Vicki, wrapping her in the white sheet as they go. Tim comes back simultaneously with Poppy, cramming her into the real Sheikh's robes.*

**Dotty**  *(looking at Poppy)*  And here she is! In her wedding dress!

**Flavia**  *(looking at Vicki)*  Yes, yes - it's their wedding day!

**Mrs Clackett**  *(still looking at Poppy)*  It's their wedding day!
Others

Ah!

Flavia

What a happy ending!

Mrs Clackett pushes Poppy to Lloyd’s side. Flavia pushes Vicki to his other side.

Mrs Clackett

Do you take this sheet to be your lawful wedded wife? If not, speak now, or forever hold your peace.

Lloyd nods helplessly.

Selsdon

What's he saying, what's he saying?

Flavia

He's saying... he's saying... 'Last line!'

Selsdon

Last line? Me?

All

Last line, last line!

Selsdon

When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a good old-fashioned plate of......

He dries.

All

(holding up plates of sardines; beseechingly) Curtain!

Tableau. Then Tim runs hurriedly off.

CURTAIN.

Except that it jams just above the level of their heads.
As one man they seize hold of it and drag it down. A ripping sound. The curtain detaches itself from its fixings and falls on top of them all, leaving a floundering mass of bodies on stage.