

Start

ACT II

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

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

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

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

POPPY is speaking into the microphone in the prompt corner.

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

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

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

TIM Will she?

POPPY You know what Dotty's like.

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

POPPY If only she'd speak!

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

POPPY Won't go on?

TIM If she won't.

POPPY She will.

TIM Of course she will.

POPPY Won't she?

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

POPPY She must!

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

POPPY I'd have five minutes to change. Four minutes.

TIM If only she'd say something.

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

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

Exit POPPY in the direction of the dressing rooms.

LLOYD puts his head back round the door.

TIM Lloyd! I didn't know you were coming today!

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

LLOYD I wasn't. I haven't.

TIM Anyway, thank God you're here!

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

TIM Dotty and Garry...

LLOYD I don't want anyone to know I'm in.

TIM No, but Dotty and Garry...

LLOYD I just want two hours alone and undisturbed with Brooke in her dressing room between shows, then I'm on the 7:25 back to Wales. (*Gives TIM the whisky*) This is for Brooke. Put it somewhere safe. Make sure Selsdon doesn't get his hands on it.

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

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

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

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

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

LLOYD First house finishes just after five, yes? Second house starts at seven-thirty?

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

LLOYD She hasn't walked out already?

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

LLOYD You've called beginners?

TIM Yes!

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

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

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

TIM Brooke? Not Brooke—Dotty!

LLOYD Oh, Dotty.

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

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

TIM She went out with this journalist bloke...

LLOYD Journalist—yes, yes...

TIM But you know Garry threatened to kill him?

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

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

LLOYD Tim, let me tell you something about *my* life. I have the Duke of Buckingham on the phone to me for an hour after rehearsal every evening complaining that the Duke of Gloucester is sucking boiled sweets through his speeches. The Duke of Clarence is off for the entire week doing a commercial for Madeira. Richard himself—would you believe? —Richard III? (*He demonstrates.*) —has now gone down with a back problem. I keep getting messages from Brooke about how unhappy she is here, and now she's got herself a doctor's certificate for nervous exhaustion—she's going to walk! I have no time to find or rehearse another