

*All in all, a superb example of the traditional English set-builder's craft—a place where the discerning theatregoer will feel instantly at home.*

*Introductory music. As the curtain rises, the award-winning modern telephone is ringing.*

*Enter from the service quarters MRS CLACKETT, a housekeeper of character. She is carrying an imposing plate of sardines.*

**MRS CLACKETT** It's no good you going on. I can't open sardines and answer the phone. I've only got one pair of feet.

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

Hello... Yes, but there's no one here, love... No, Mr Brent's not here... He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain... Mr Philip Brent, that's right... The one who writes the plays, that's him, only now he writes them in Spain... No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here... Am *I* in Spain? No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with, because it's the royal what's it called on the telly—the royal you know—where's the paper, then...?

*She picks up the newspaper lying on the sofa and searches in it.*

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

*She replaces the receiver.*

Scene 1: Dotty, Lloyd, Granny (Roger), Brooke (Vicki)

ACT I

3

Start

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

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

*Exit MRS CLACKETT into the study, still holding the newspaper.*

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

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

*The disembodied voice of LLOYD DALLAS, the director of 'Nothing On', replies from somewhere out in the darkness of the auditorium.*

**LLOYD** You leave the sardines, and you put the receiver back.

**DOTTY** Oh yes, I put the receiver back.

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

**LLOYD** And you leave the sardines.

**DOTTY** And I leave the sardines?

**LLOYD** You leave the sardines.

**DOTTY** I put the receiver back and I leave the sardines.

**LLOYD** Right.

**DOTTY** We've changed that, have we, love?

**LLOYD** No, love.

**DOTTY** That's what I've always been doing?

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

LLOYD Some of them have a very familiar ring.

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

LLOYD I know that, Dotty.

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

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

DOTTY I'm holding the receiver.

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

*DOTTY resumes her performance as MRS CLACKETT.*

MRS CLACKETT Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, don't go away, I'm putting it down.

*She replaces the receiver.*

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

*Exit MRS CLACKETT into the study, still holding the newspaper. Only she isn't holding the newspaper.*

*The sound of a key in the lock.*

LLOYD Hold it.

*The front door opens. On the doorstep stands ROGER, holding a cardboard box. He is about thirty, and has the well-appointed air of a man who handles high-class real estate.*

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

LLOYD Hold it, Garry. Dotty!

*Enter VICKI through the front door. She is a desirable property in her early twenties, well-built and beautifully maintained throughout.*

ROGER So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

LLOYD Hold it, Brooke. Dotty!

*Enter DOTTY from the study.*

DOTTY Come back?

LLOYD Yes, and go out again with the newspaper.

DOTTY The newspaper? Oh, the newspaper.

LLOYD You put the receiver back, you leave the sardines, and you go out with the newspaper.

GARRY Here you are, love.

DOTTY Sorry, love.

GARRY (*embraces her*) Don't worry, love. It's only the technical.

LLOYD It's the dress, Garry, honey. It's the dress rehearsal.

GARRY So when was the technical?

LLOYD So when's the dress? We open tomorrow!

GARRY Well, we're all thinking of it as the technical. (*To DOTTY*) Aren't we, love?

DOTTY It's all those words, my sweetheart.

GARRY Don't worry about the words, Dotty, my pet.

DOTTY Coming up like oranges and lemons.

GARRY Listen, Dotty, your words are fine, your words are better than the, do you know what I mean? (*To BROOKE*) Isn't that right?

BROOKE (*her thoughts elsewhere*) Sorry?

GARRY (to DOTTY) I mean, OK, so he's the, you know. Fine.  
But, Dotty, love, you've been playing this kind of part for,  
well, you know what I mean.

LLOYD All right? So Garry and Brooke are off, Dotty's holding  
the receiver...

GARRY No, but here we are, we're all thinking, my God, we  
open tomorrow, we've only had a fortnight to rehearse, we  
don't know where we are, but my God, here we are!

DOTTY That's right, my sweet. Isn't that right, Lloyd?

LLOYD Beautifully put, Garry.

GARRY No, but we've got to play Weston-super-Mare all the  
rest of this week, then Yeovil, then God knows where, then  
God knows where else, and so on for God knows how long,  
and we're all of us feeling pretty much, you know... (To  
BROOKE) I mean, aren't you?

BROOKE Sorry?

LLOYD Anyway, you're off, Dotty's holding the receiver...

GARRY Sorry, Lloyd. But sometimes you just have to come right  
out with it. You know?

LLOYD I know.

GARRY Thanks, Lloyd.

LLOYD OK, Garry. So you're off...

GARRY Lloyd, let me just say one thing. Since we've stopped.  
I've worked with a lot of directors, Lloyd. Some of them  
were geniuses. Some of them were bastards. But I've never  
met one who was so totally and absolutely... I don't know...

LLOYD Thank you, Garry. I'm very touched. Now will you get  
off the fucking stage?

*Exit GARRY through the front door.*

And, Brooke...

BROOKE Yes?

LLOYD Are you in?

BROOKE In?

LLOYD Are you there?

BROOKE What?

LLOYD You're out. OK. I'll call again. And on we go.

*Exit BROOKE through the front door.*

So there you are, holding the receiver.

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

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

LLOYD And you take the newspaper.

*She comes back, and picks up the newspaper and the  
receiver.*

DOTTY I leave the sardines, I take the newspaper.

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

DOTTY And off at last I go.

LLOYD Leaving the receiver.

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

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

*Enter VICKI as before.*

So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

*ROGER goes back and brings in a flight bag, and closes the  
front door.*

*He opens the door to the service quarters. VICKI gazes round.*

Hello? Anyone at home?

*Closes the door.*

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

VICKI Great. And this is all yours?

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

VICKI It must have cost a bomb.

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

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

*end* 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

*Enter MRS CLACKETT from the study, without the newspaper.*

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

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

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

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

ROGER I'm from the agents.

MRS CLACKETT From the agents?

ROGER Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

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

ROGER I'm Tramplemain.

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

ROGER No, I just dropped in to...go into a few things...

*The bathroom door opens. ROGER closes it.*

Well, to check some of the measurements...

*The bathroom door opens. ROGER closes it.*

Do one or two odd jobs...

*The bathroom door opens. ROGER closes it.*

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

*The bathroom door opens.*

VICKI What's wrong with this door?