

**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.

Start

**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.

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

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

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

**Roger** Yes, but I could hear voices!

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.*

**Vicki** Voices? What sort of voices?

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

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

**Lloyd** No.

**Frederick** I thought it might be somehow more logical.

**Lloyd** No.

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

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

*Enter Belinda from the mezzanine bathroom, to wait patiently.*

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

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

**Frederick** I see that.

**Belinda** And Freddie, my sweet, Selsdon needs them in the study for *his* scene.

**Frederick** I see that . . .

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

**Belinda** (*calling, urgently*) Selsdon!

**Dotty** (*likewise*) Selsdon!

**Garry** (*likewise*) Selsdon!

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

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

*He becomes aware of the others.*

**Selsdon** No?

**Lloyd** No. Not yet. Thank you, Selsdon.

**Selsdon** I thought I heard my name.

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

**Selsdon** I'm so sorry.

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

*Enter Poppy. She puts the glass back.*

**Lloyd** And, Selsdon . . .

**Selsdon** Yes?

**Lloyd** Beautiful performance.

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

*Exit Selsdon through the window.*

**Lloyd** He even remembered the line.

**Frederick** All right, I see all that.

**Lloyd** (*faintly*) Oh, no!

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

**Lloyd** *comes up on stage.*

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

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

**Lloyd** Who knows? The wellsprings of human action are deep and cloudy. (*To Frederick.*) Maybe something

happened to you as a very small child which made you frightened to let go of groceries.

**Belinda** Or it could be genetic.

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

**Lloyd** It could well be.

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

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

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

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

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

**Lloyd** *returns to the stalls.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Exit Frederick into the study.*

**Belinda** (*to Lloyd*) Bless you, my sweet.

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

*Exit Belinda into the mezzanine bathroom.*

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

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

**Roger** Yes, but I could hear voices!

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.*

**Vicki** Voices? What sort of voices?

**Roger** People's voices.

**Vicki** But there's no one here.

**Roger** Darling, I saw the door handle move! It could be someone from the office, checking up.

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

**Roger** Mrs Crackett.

**Vicki** Mrs Crackett?

**Roger** One has to set an example to the staff.

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

*She moves to go downstairs. Roger grabs her.*

**Roger** Come back!

**Vicki** What?

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

**Vicki** Why not?

END

Start

**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.

END

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

**Philip/Tim** Agh!

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

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

*Enter through the front door the most sought-after of all properties on the market today – a **Sheikh**. He is wearing Arab robes and bears a strong resemblance to **Philip**, since he is also played by **Frederick**.*

**Sheikh** Ah! A house of heavenly peace! I rent it!

**Roger** Hold on, hold on . . . I know that face! (*Pulls the Sheikh's burnous aside to reveal his face.*) He isn't a sheikh! He's that sex-maniac!

**Flavia** Yes – it's my husband!

**Sheikh** What?

*They all fall upon him.*

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

**Lloyd** Trousers!

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

**Sheikh** What? What?

**Lloyd** Trousers! Trousers!

**Vicki** You snatch my bathmat! (*She tries to pull his burnous off him.*)

**Sheikh** What? What? What?

**Flavia** You toss me aside like a broken china doll! (*She hits him.*)

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

Start

*Everyone except **Selsdon** finally comes to a halt.*

**Burglar** And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke . . .

*Even **Selsdon** becomes aware that the action has ceased.*

**Selsdon** Stop?

**Belinda** Stop, stop.

**Lloyd** *comes up on stage.*

**Lloyd** It's a question of authenticity, you see, Freddie. *Do Arab potentates wear trousers under their robes? I don't know. Maybe they do. But not round their ankles, Freddie! Not round their ankles!*

**Frederick** Sorry. It's just frightfully difficult doing a quick change without a dresser.

**Lloyd** Get Tim to help you. Tim! Where's Tim? Come on, Tim! Tim!

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

**Tim** Sorry?

**Lloyd** Oh, yes. You're acting.

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

**Lloyd** Never mind, Tim.

**Tim** Do something?

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

**Frederick** *hesitates.*

**Lloyd** Some other problem, Freddie?

END