

## Act Two

*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!

Start

**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 round. 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.*

**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 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.

END

**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!

CALLBACK Tim 5/6

## Act Three

*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.*

Start

**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 that 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 and 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 hold-ups. 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.*

END