

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!

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!

Start

Lloyd Tell me, Poppy, love – how did you get a job like this, that requires tact and understanding? You're not somebody's girlfriend, 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?

Lloyd What?

Belinda *(points to the bedroom and the service quarters)* Garry and Dotty.

Lloyd Garry and Dotty?

Belinda Sh!

END

② POPPY

3/8

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.*

Start | **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 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.

END

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 sit out there and listen to 'two minutes . . . three minutes . . . one minute . . . two minutes'!

Belinda My sweet, we're having great dramas downstairs!

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.

Start

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.*)

END

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!

Start

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!

END