

Scene #1
Dotty/Clackett
Lloyd

Act One

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

(Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare. Monday 14 January.)

From the estate agent's description of the property:

A delightful 16th-century posset mill, 25 miles from London. Lovingly converted, old-world atmosphere, many period features. Fully equipped with every aid to modern living and beautifully furnished throughout by owner now resident abroad. Ideal for overseas company seeking perfect English setting to house senior executive. Minimum three months' let. Apply sole agents: Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

The accommodation comprises: an open-plan living area, with a staircase leading to a gallery. A notable feature is the extensive range of entrances and exits provided. On the ground floor the front door gives access to the mature garden and delightful village beyond. Another door leads to the elegant panelled study, and a third to the light and airy modern service quarters. A fourth door opens into a luxurious bathroom/WC suite, and a full-length south-facing window affords extensive views. On the gallery level is the door to the master bedroom, and another to a small but well-proportioned linen cupboard. A corridor gives access to all the other rooms in the upper parts of the house. Another beautifully equipped bathroom/WC suite opens off the landing halfway up the stairs.

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.

8 Noises Off

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.

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?

Lloyd I shouldn't say that, Dotty, my precious.

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.*

END