

our long and highly successful tour...

POPPY. *(Over Tannoy.)* Ladies and gentlemen. We apologize 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 holdups. 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.)* I can't pick sardines off the floor and answer the phone. *(She dumps the handful of sardines on the plate.)* I've only got one leg. *(She shifts the plate to her right hand and picks up the phone with the left. Into the phone, bravely.)* Hello... Yes, but there's no one here... No, Mr. Brent's not here... *(She puts the plate of sardines newspaper down next to the newspaper on the sofa as she speaks and picks up the newspaper. She shakes the outer sheet free and wipes her oily hand on it as best she can. The rest of the newspaper disintegrates and falls back on top of the sardines.)* 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, only why he wants to get mixed up in plays God only knows, he'd be safer off in the lion's cage at the zoo... No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here... Am I in Spain...? *(She realizes that she is holding the sheet of newspaper instead of the sardines. She turns round to look for them as she speaks, winding herself into the telephone cord.)* 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... *(She sits down uncertainly on the heap of newspaper.)* ... because it's the royal what's it called on the telly — the royal you know... *(She realizes that she is sitting on the sardines, and extracts the plate as discreetly as possible as she speaks.)* ... 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...? *(She examines the flattened contents of the plate.)* No, they're not in Spain, they're just a bit squashed. Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on... *(She stands up to go, uncertainly balancing plate, sheet of newspaper, and phone.)* ... I'm going to do something wrong here. *(She starts to go, then realizes there are loose sheets of newspaper all over the floor, and bends down to pick them up. The sardines slide off the plate on to the floor.)* Always the same, isn't it. *(She starts to go again.)* One minute you've got too much on your plate... *(She realizes that she has nothing on her plate, turns round and sees the sardines.)* ... next thing you know they've gone again.

*(She uncertainly drops a few sheets of the newspaper over the sardines and exits into the study, holding the empty plate and the telephone receiver. The body of the phone falls off its table and follows her to the door.)*

The sound of a key in the lock. The front door opens. On the doorstep is ROGER, carrying a cardboard box.)

ROGER. ... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off. *(Enter VICKI. The body of the phone begins to creep inconspicuously towards the door.)* So we've got the place entirely to ourselves. *(ROGER goes back and brings in a flight bag and closes the front*