

#3 Poppy, Tim, Lloyd

ACT II

The living room of the Brenis' country home. Wednesday afternoon. (Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne. Wednesday matinee, February 13.)

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 around. 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.

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. ~~Belinda just one after-noon 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!

(*TIM hurries to the microphone in the prompt corner, still holding the money and whisky.*)

LLOYD. And don't let Poppy see those flowers!

(*Exit LLOYD through the pass door.*)

TIM. (*Into microphone.*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in three minutes.

(*Enter POPPY from the dressing rooms.*)

POPPY. We're going to be so late up!

TIM. No luck?

POPPY. Belinda's having a go. I haven't even started the front of house calls yet... Money? What's this for?

TIM. Nothing, nothing! (*He puts the money behind his back and automatically produces the whisky with the other hand.*)

POPPY. Whisky!

TIM. Oh... is it?

POPPY. Where did you find that?

TIM. Well...

POPPY. Up here? You mean Selsdon's hiding them round the stage now? (*She takes the whisky.*)

TIM. Oh...

POPPY. I'll put it in the ladies' loo. At least he won't go in there. (*Enter BELINDA from the dressing rooms.*) No?

BELINDA. You know what Dotty's like when she's like this. Freddie's trying now... (*She sees the whisky.*) Oh, no!

POPPY. He's hiding them round the stage now. (*Enter FREDERICK from the dressing rooms.*) No?

FREDERICK. No.

BELINDA. You didn't try for very long, my precious!

FREDERICK. No, well... (*He sees the whisky.*) Oh dear.

BELINDA. He's hiding them on stage now.

(*Exit POPPY to the dressing rooms, holding the whisky.*)

FREDERICK. No, Garry came rushing out of his dressing room in a great state. I couldn't quite understand what he was saying. I often feel with Garry that I must have missed something somewhere. You know how stupid I am about that kind of thing. But I think he was saying he wanted to kill me.

BELINDA. Oh, my poor sweet!

FREDERICK. I thought I'd better leave him to it. I don't want to make things worse. He's all right, is he?

BELINDA. Who, Garry? Anything but, by the sound of it!

FREDERICK. I mean, he's going on?

TIM. Garry? Garry's going on. Of course he's going on. What's all this about Garry not going on?

BELINDA. Yes, because if you have to go on for Garry, Poppy can't go on for Dotty, because if Poppy goes on for Dotty, you'll have to be on the book!