



**Poppy**

SELSDON.) Oh.

SELSDON. Beer? In the wardrobe?

LLOYD. No, Selsdon. Tim, you need a break. Why don't you sit down quietly upstairs and do all the company's VAT?

TIM. VAT, right.

LLOYD. (*Discreetly.*) And Tim — just in case he and the gear *do* walk off together one night, order yourself a spare Burglar costume.

TIM. Spare Burglar costume.

LLOYD. *Two* spare Burglar costumes. One to fit you, one to fit Poppy. I want a plentiful supply of spare Burglars on hand for any eventuality.

TIM. Two spare Burglars.

(*Exit TIM into the wings.*)

BELINDA. He has been on his feet for forty-eight hours, Lloyd.

LLOYD. (*Calling.*) Don't fall down, Tim. We may not be insured.

SELSDON. So what's next on the bill?

LLOYD. Well, Selsdon, I thought we might try a spot of rehearsal.

SELSDON. Oh, I won't, thank you.

LLOYD. You *won't*?

SELSDON. You all go ahead. I'll sit and watch you. This is the beer in the wardrobe, is it?

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!

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.)*

## ACT II

*The living room of the Brents' 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.)*

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 ...