

Mrs. Clackett is housekeeper

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NOISES OFF

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. (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

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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.)

MRS. CLACKETT. Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, don't go away, I'm putting it down. (She replaces the receiver.) Always the same, isn't it. Put your feet up for two minutes, and immediately they come running after you.

(Exit MRS. CLACKETT into the study, still holding the newspaper. Only she isn't holding the newspaper.)