

Freddy, Lloyd, Belinda

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NOISES OFF

SIDE # 2/

LLOYD. Hold it. Freddie, what's the trouble?

FREDERICK. Lloyd, you know how stupid I am about moves. Sorry, Garry. ... Sorry, Brooke. ... It's just my usual dimness. *(To LLOYD.)* But why do I take the things off into the study? Wouldn't it be more natural if I left them on?

LLOYD. No.

FREDERICK. I thought it might be somehow more logical.

LLOYD. No.

FREDERICK. Lloyd, I know it's a bit late in the day to go into all this...

LLOYD. Freddie, we've got several more minutes left before we open.

(Enter BELINDA from the mezzanine bathroom, to wait patiently.)

FREDERICK. Thank you, Lloyd. As long as we're not too pushed. But I've never understood why he carries an overnight bag and a box of groceries into the study to look at his mail.

GARRY. Because they have to be out of the way for my next scene!

FREDERICK. I see that.

BELINDA. And Freddie, my sweet, Selsdon needs them in the study for *his* scene.

FREDERICK. I see that...

LLOYD. *(Comes up on stage.)* Selsdon ... where is he? Is he there?

BELINDA. *(Calling, urgently.)* Selsdon!

DOTTY. *(Likewise.)* Selsdon!

GARRY. *(Likewise.)* Selsdon!

(A pane of glass shatters in the mullion window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch. Enter an elderly BURGLAR. He has great character, but is in need of extensive repair and modernization.)

BURGLAR. No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement... *(He becomes aware of the others.)* No?

LLOYD. No. Not yet. Thank you, Selsdon.

SELSDON. I thought I heard my name.

LLOYD. No, no, no. Back to sleep, Selsdon. Another ten pages before the big moment.

SELSDON. I'm so sorry.

LLOYD. Not at all. Nice to see you. Poppy, put the glass back in the window. *(Enter POPPY. She puts the glass back.)* And, Selsdon....

SELSDON. Yes?

LLOYD. Beautiful performance.

SELSDON. Oh, how kind of you. I don't think I'm quite there yet, though.

(Exit SELSDON through the window.)

LLOYD. He even remembered the line.

FREDERICK. All right, I see all that.

LLOYD. *(Faintly.)* Oh, no!

FREDERICK. I just don't know why I take them.

LLOYD. Freddie, love, why does anyone do anything? Why does that other idiot walk out through the front door holding two plates of sardines? *(To GARRY.)* I'm not getting at you, love.

GARRY. Of course not, love. *(To FREDERICK.)* I mean, why do I? *(To LLOYD.)* I mean, right, when you come to think about it, why do I?

LLOYD. Who knows? The wellsprings of human action are deep and cloudy. *(To FREDERICK.)* Maybe something happened to you as a very small child which made you frightened to let go of groceries.

BELINDA. Or it could be genetic.

GARRY. Yes, or it could be, you know.

LLOYD. It could well be.

FREDERICK. Of course. Thank you. I understand all that. But...

LLOYD. Freddie, love, I'm telling you — I don't know. I don't think the author knows. I don't know why the author came into this industry in the first place. I don't know why any of us came into it.

FREDERICK. All the same, if you could just give me a reason I could keep in my mind...

LLOYD. All right, I'll give you a reason. You carry those grocer-

ies into the study, Freddie, honey, because it's just slightly after midnight, and we're not going to be finished before we open tomorrow night. Correction — before we open *tonight*. (*FREDERICK nods, rebuked, and exits into the study. DOTTY silently follows him. GARRY and BROOKE go silently back into the bedroom. LLOYD returns to the stalls.*) And on we go. From after Freddie's exit, *with the groceries.*

BELINDA. (*Keeping her voice down.*) Lloyd, sweetheart, his wife left him this morning.

LLOYD. Oh. (*Pause.*) Freddie! (*Enter FREDERICK, still wounded, from the study.*) I think the point is that you've had a great fright when she mentions income tax, and you feel very insecure and exposed, and you want something familiar to hold on to.

FREDERICK. (*With humble gratitude.*) Thank you, Lloyd. (*He clutches the groceries to his chest.*) That's most helpful.

(*Exit FREDERICK into the study.*)

BELINDA. (*To LLOYD.*) Bless you, my sweet.

LLOYD. (*Leaves the stage.*) And on we merrily go. (*Exit BELINDA into the mezzanine bathroom.*) 'Yes, but I could hear voices...'

(*Enter ROGER from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie.*)

ROGER. Yes, but I could hear voices!

(*Enter VICKI from the bedroom in her underwear.*)

VICKI. Voices? What sort of voices?

ROGER. People's voices.

VICKI. But there's no one here.

ROGER. Darling, I saw the door-handle move! It could be someone from the office, checking up.

VICKI. I still don't see why you've got to put your tie on to look.

ROGER. Mrs. Crackett.

VICKI. Mrs. Crackett?