

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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Three Plays - Absurd  
Person Singular, Absent  
Friends, Bedroom Farce

Alan Ayckbourn

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## About the Book

In *Three Plays* Ayckbourn's darkly comic, perfectly pitched dialogue slices into the soul of suburbia. The settings are simple - a kitchen, a bedroom, a party - where couples meet, bewildered, puzzled and angry. The fraught relationships between men and women are exposed with humour, bathos and a sharp understanding of human nature.

## About the Author

Born in London in 1939, Alan Ayckbourn is one of Britain's most popular and prolific playwrights. He has written 74 full length plays and more than 20 other revues and plays for children. Alan Ayckbourn was awarded a CBE in 1987. Ten years later he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II 'for services to the theatre'.

ALAN AYCKBOURN

Three Plays:  
Absurd Person  
Singular,  
Absent Friends,  
Bedroom Farce

VINTAGE BOOKS  
London

## PREFACE

*Absurd Person Singular* - the title was originally intended for a play I didn't write and subsequently, because I rather cared for it, given to the play I did write - was first produced in Scarborough in 1972.

At that time, I remember, I was becoming increasingly fascinated by the dramatic possibilities of offstage action. Not a new device, granted, but one with plenty of comic potential still waiting to be tapped. Very early on in my career as a dramatist I discovered that, given the chance, an audience's imagination can do far better work than any number of playwright's words. The offstage character hinted at but never seen can be dramatically as significant and telling as his onstage counterparts. Offstage action is more difficult. Unless care is taken, if the dramatist chooses to describe rather than show his action, the audience can rapidly come to the conclusion that they're sitting in the wrong auditorium.

Thus, when I came to write *Absurd Person* and started by setting the action in Jane and Sidney Hopcroft's sitting room, I was halfway through the act before I realised that I was viewing the evening from totally the wrong perspective. Dick and Lottie were indeed monstrously overwhelming, hearty and ultimately very boring, and far better heard occasionally but not seen. By a simple switch of setting to the kitchen, the problem was all but solved, adding incidentally far greater comic possibilities than the sitting room ever held. For in this particular case, the obvious offstage action was far more relevant than its onstage counterpart.

As a footnote: since I was writing about parties and guests arriving, it also relieved me of the tedium of all that hallo-how-are-you-goodbye-nice-to-see-you business.

*Absurd Person*, then, could be described as my first offstage action play. It is also, some critics have observed, a rather weighty comedy. Its last scene darkens considerably. I make no apologies for this. As I've grown in confidence as a dramatist (confidence, that is, that I can get most of the techniques right most of the time), I have also grown in the conviction that I owe it to the characters I've created to develop and therefore to a certain extent to dictate how a play should run.

I've always had an aversion to comedies that rely upon natty, superimposed denouements in order to round off the evening. Why comedies should have to do this whereas dramas are allowed to finish as they like is beyond me. As a nation, we show a marked preference for comedy when it comes to playgoing, as any theatre manager will tell you. At the same time, over a large area of the stalls one can detect a faint sense of guilt that there is something called enjoyment going on. Should we, people seem to be asking, be sitting here laughing like this? It's to do with the mistaken belief that because it's funny, it can't be serious - which of course isn't true at all. Heavy, no; serious, yes. It would therefore seem unwise to compound this guilt feeling by artificially resolving the play. In other words, it can be funny, but let's make it truthful.

*Absent Friends*, first produced in Scarborough in 1974, followed *The Norman Conquests*, which to all intents and purposes was the end of my exploration of offstage action. Three plays, two of which were happening offstage simultaneously with the one onstage, were quite enough. *Absent Friends* was almost a drawing-in of forces. It was significant for me in several ways. Its use of time, for one. The stage action matches real time almost second for second. Most plays have their own time span where hours

or months can pass quite happily in the space of minutes. *Absent Friends'* time span, being what it is, had the intended consequence of making the play far more claustrophobic, almost oppressive.

Its single set, its small detailed action, helped. It is a play for a small intimate theatre where one can hear the actors breathing and the silences ticking away. It was a terrifying risk when it was first produced. I'd never pitched anything in quite such a low key before.

Following this (with only the five short plays entitled *Confusions* between them) came the far more robust *Bedroom Farce*. This play has, I think, elements of both *Absurd Person* and *Absent Friends* in it. It has its moments of near farce and yet still contains elements of the claustrophobic - maybe because it's all in bedrooms. It is also the first time I've made use, to quite such an extent, of the cross-cut device. Jumping the action from bedroom to bedroom gives the play an added rhythm over and above what the dialogue normally provides. Again, I've allowed the characters to progress, develop and resolve very much in their own way. Perhaps, as in my other plays, none of them finds instant happiness or sudden great self-insight. But at least they retain the dignity of resolving their own destinies.

Alan Ayckbourn  
Scarborough 1976



# **ABSURD PERSON SINGULAR**

First produced at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in June 1972 and subsequently by Michael Codron at the Criterion Theatre, London, on the 4th July 1973, with the following cast:

Sidney	Richard Briers
Jane	Bridget Turner
Ronald	Michael Aldridge
Marion	Sheila Hancock
Geoffrey	David Burke
Eva	Anna Calder-Marshall

The play directed by Eric Thompson  
Settings by Alan Tagg

Act I Sidney and Jane's Kitchen. Last Christmas  
Act II Geoffrey and Eva's Kitchen. This Christmas  
Act III Ronald and Marion's Kitchen. Next Christmas

# ACT ONE

SIDNEY and JANE HOPCROFT's kitchen of their small suburban house. Last Christmas

*Although on a modest scale, it is a model kitchen. Whilst not containing all the gadgetry, it does have an automatic washing machine, a fridge, an electric cooker and a gleaming sink unit. All these are contained or surrounded by smart formica-topped working surfaces with the usual drawers and cupboards. The room also contains a small table, also formica-topped, and matching chairs.*

*When the CURTAIN rises, JANE, a woman in her thirties, is discovered bustling round wiping the floor, cupboard doors, working surfaces—in fact, anything in sight—with a cloth. She sings happily as she works. She wears a pinafore and bedroom slippers, but, under this, a smart new party dress. She is unimaginatively made up and her hair is tightly permed. She wears rubber gloves to protect her hands.*

*As JANE works, SIDNEY enters, a small dapper man of about the same age. He has a small trimmed moustache and a cheery, unflappable manner. He wears his best, rather old-fashioned, sober suit. A dark tie, polished hair and shoes complete the picture.*

SIDNEY: Hallo, hallo. What are we up to out here, eh?

JANE: [*without pausing in her work*] Just giving it a wipe.

SIDNEY: Dear oh dear. Good gracious me. Does it need it?

Like a battleship. Just like a battleship. They need you in the Royal Navy.

JANE: [*giggling*] Silly ...

SIDNEY: No—the Royal Navy.

JANE: Silly ...

[*SIDNEY goes to the back door, turns the yale knob, opens it and sticks his hand out*]

SIDNEY: Still raining, I see.

JANE: Shut the door, it's coming in.

SIDNEY: Cats and dogs. Dogs and cats. [*He shuts the door, wiping his wet hand on his handkerchief. Striding to the centre of the room and staring up at his digital clock*] Eighteen-twenty-three. [*Consulting his watch*] Eighteen-twenty-three. Getting on. Seven minutes - they'll be here.

JANE: Oh. [*She straightens up and looks round the kitchen for somewhere she's missed*]

SIDNEY: I've got a few games lined up.

JANE: Games?

SIDNEY: Just in case.

JANE: Oh good.

SIDNEY: I've made a parcel for "Pass the Parcel", sorted out a bit of music for musical bumps and thought out a few forfeits.

JANE: Good.

SIDNEY: I've thought up some real devils. [*He puts his leg on the table*]

JANE: I bet. [*She knocks his leg off, and wipes*]

SIDNEY: Just in case. Just in case things need jollying up. [*Seeing JANE still wiping*] I don't want to disappoint you but we're not going to be out here for our drinks, you know.

JANE: Yes, I know.

SIDNEY: The way you're going ...

JANE: They might want to look ...

SIDNEY: I doubt it.

JANE: The ladies might.

SIDNEY: [*chuckling knowingly*] I don't imagine the wife of a banker will particularly choose to spend her evening in our kitchen. Smart as it is.

JANE: No?

SIDNEY: I doubt if she spends very much time in her own kitchen. Let alone ours.

JANE: Still ...

SIDNEY: Very much the lady of leisure, Mrs Brewster-Wright. Or so I would imagine.

JANE: What about Mrs Jackson?

SIDNEY: [*doubtfully*] Well-again, not a woman you think of in the same breath as you would a kitchen.

JANE: All women are interested in kitchens. [*She turns to the sink*]

SIDNEY: [*ironically*] Oh, if you're looking for a little job ...

JANE: What's that?

SIDNEY: A small spillage. My fault.

JANE: [*very alarmed*] Where?

SIDNEY: In there. On the sideboard.

JANE: Oh, Sidney. [*She snatches up an assortment of cloths, wet and dry*]

SIDNEY: Nothing serious.

JANE: Honestly.

[*Sidney goes to the back door, opens it, sticks a hand out*]

SIDNEY: Dear oh dear. [*He closes the door and dries his hand on his handkerchief*]

JANE: [*returning*] Honestly.

SIDNEY: Could you see it?

JANE: You spoil that surface if you leave it. You leave a ring. [*She returns her dish cloth to the sink, her dry cloths to the drawer and now takes out a duster and a tin of polish*] Now that room's going to smell of polish. I had the windows open all day so it wouldn't.

SIDNEY: Well then, don't polish.

JANE: I have to polish. There's a mark. [*She goes to the door and then pauses*] I know, bring the air freshener.

SIDNEY: Air freshener?

JANE: Under the sink.

[*JANE exits*]

SIDNEY: Ay, ay, Admiral. [*He whistles a sailor's horn-pipe, amused*] Dear oh dear. [*He opens the cupboard under the sink, rummages and brings out an aerosol tin. He is one of those men who like to read all small print. This he*

*does, holding the tin at arm's length to do so. Reading* "Shake can before use." [*He does so. Reading*] "Remove cap." [*He does so. Reading*] "Hold away from body and spray into air by depressing button." [*He holds the can away from his body, points it in the air and depresses the button. The spray hisses out over his shirt front*] Dear oh dear [*He puts down the tin, wipes his shirt-front with a dishcloth*]

[JANE *enters*]

JANE: What are you doing?

SIDNEY: Just getting this to rights. Just coming to terms with your air freshener.

JANE: That's the fly spray.

SIDNEY: Ah.

JANE: Honestly. [*She takes the canister from him and puts it on top of the washing machine*]

SIDNEY: My mistake.

JANE: For someone who's good at some things you're hopeless.

SIDNEY: Beg your pardon, Admiral, beg your pardon.

[JANE *puts away the duster and polish*]

[*Checking his watch with the clock*] Four and a half minutes to go.

JANE: And you've been at those nuts, haven't you?

SIDNEY: Nuts?

JANE: In there. In the bowl. On the table. Those nuts. You know the ones I mean.

SIDNEY: I may have had a little dip. Anyway, how did you know I'd been at those nuts? Eh? How did you know, old eagle-eye?

JANE: Because I know how I left them. Now come on, out of my way. Don't start that. I've got things to do.

SIDNEY: [*closing with her*] What about a kiss then?

JANE: [*trying to struggle free*] Sidney ...

SIDNEY: Come on. Christmas kiss.

JANE: Sidney. No, not now. What's the matter with you?

Sidney ... [*She pauses, sniffing*]

SIDNEY: What's the matter now?

JANE: What's that smell?

SIDNEY: Eh?

JANE : It's on your tie. What's this smell on your tie?

[*They both sniff his tie*]

There. Can you smell?

SIDNEY: Oh, that'll be the fly spray.

JANE: Fly spray?

SIDNEY: Had a bit of a backfire.

JANE: It's killed off your after-shave.

SIDNEY: [*jovially*] As long as it hasn't killed off my flies, eh.

[*He laughs*]

[*JANE laughs*]

[*Suddenly cutting through this*] Eighteen-twenty-eight.

Two minutes.

JANE: [*nervous again*] I hope everything's all right.

SIDNEY: When?

JANE: For them. I want it to be right.

SIDNEY: Of course it's right.

JANE: I mean. I don't want you to be let down. Not by me. I want it to look good for you. I don't want to let you down

...

SIDNEY: You never have yet ...

JANE: No, but it's special tonight, isn't it? I mean, with Mr and Mrs Brewster-Wright and Mr and Mrs Jackson. It's important.

SIDNEY: Don't forget Dick and Lottie Potter. They're coming, too.

JANE: Oh, well, I don't count Dick and Lottie. They're friends.

SIDNEY: I trust by the end of this evening, we shall all be friends. Just don't get nervous. That's all. Don't get nervous. [*He consults the clock and checks it with his watch*] One minute to go.

*[A slight pause. The front door chimes sound]*

What was that?

JANE: The front door.

SIDNEY: They're early. Lucky we're ready for them.

JANE: Yes. *[In a sudden panic]* I haven't sprayed the room.

SIDNEY: All right, all right. You can do it whilst I'm letting them in. Plenty of time.

JANE: It doesn't take a second.

*[JANE snatches up the air freshener and follows SIDNEY out into the sitting-room. A silence. JANE comes hurrying back into the kitchen]*

*[JANE puts away the air freshener, removes her pinny, straightens her clothing and hair in the mirror, creeps back to the kitchen door and opens it a chink. Voices are heard-SIDNEY's and two others. One is a jolly hearty male voice and one a jolly hearty female voice. They are DICK and LOTTIE POTTER, whom we have the good fortune never to meet in person, but quite frequently hear whenever the door to the kitchen is open. Both have loud, braying distinctive laughs. JANE closes the door, cutting off the voices, straightens her hair and dress for the last time, looks at a mirror on the wall, grips the door handle, takes a deep breath, is about to make her entrance into the room when she sees she is still wearing her bedroom slippers]*

Oh.

*[She takes off her slippers, puts them on the table and scuttles round the kitchen looking for her shoes. She cannot find them. She picks up the slippers and wipes the table with their fluffy side, where they have made a mark]*

Oh.

*[She hurries back to the door, opens it a fraction. Jolly chatter and laughter is heard. JANE stands for a long time, peeping through the crack in the door, trying to catch sight of her shoes. She sees them. She closes the door again. She stands lost]*



Oh. Oh. Oh.

*[The door opens. Loud laughter from off. SIDNEY comes in laughing. He closes the door. The laughter cuts off abruptly]*

SIDNEY: *[fiercely, in a low voice]* Come on. What are you doing?

JANE: I can't.

SIDNEY: What?

JANE: I've got no shoes.

SIDNEY: What do you mean, no shoes?

JANE: They're in there.

SIDNEY: Where?

JANE: By the fireplace. I left them so I could slip them on.

SIDNEY: Well, then, why didn't you?

JANE: I didn't have time. I forgot.

SIDNEY: Well, come and get them.

JANE: No ...

SIDNEY: It's only Dick and Lottie Potter.

JANE: You fetch them.

SIDNEY: I can't fetch them.

JANE: Yes, you can. Pick them up and bring them in here.

SIDNEY: But I ...

JANE: Sidney, please.

SIDNEY: Dear oh dear. What a start. I say, what a start. *[He opens the door cautiously and listens. Silence]* They've stopped talking.

JANE: Have they?

SIDNEY: Wondering where we are, no doubt.

JANE: Well, go in. Here.

SIDNEY: What?

JANE: *[handing him her slippers]* Take these.

SIDNEY: What do I do with these?

JANE: The hall cupboard.

SIDNEY: You're really expecting rather a lot tonight, aren't you?

JANE: I'm sorry.

SIDNEY: Yes, well it's got to stop. It's got to stop. I have to entertain out there, you know. [*He opens the door and starts laughing heartily as he does so*]

[*SIDNEY goes out, closing the door*]

[*JANE hurries about nervously, making still more adjustments to her person and checking her appearance in the mirror*]

[*At length the door opens, letting in a bellow of laughter.*

[*SIDNEY returns, carrying JANE's shoes*]

[*Behind him*] Yes, I will. I will. I'll tell her that, Dick ...

[*He laughs until he's shut the door. His laugh cuts off abruptly. Thrusting JANE's shoes at her, ungraciously*]

Here.

JANE: Oh, thank goodness.

SIDNEY: Now for heaven's sake, come in.

JANE: [*struggling into her shoes*] Yes, I'm sorry. What did Dick say?

SIDNEY: When?

JANE: Just now? That you told him you'd tell me.

SIDNEY: I really can't remember. Now then, are you ready?

JANE: Yes, yes.

SIDNEY: It's a good job it's only Dick and Lottie out there.

It might have been the Brewster-Wrights. I'd have had a job explaining this to them. Walking in and out like a shoe salesman. All right?

JANE: Yes.

SIDNEY: Right. [*He throws open the door, jovially*] Here she is. [*Pushing JANE ahead of him*] Here she is at last.

[*Hearty cries of "Ah ha" from DICK and LOTTIE*]

JANE: [*going in*] Here I am.

[*JANE and SIDNEY exit*]

SIDNEY: [*closing the door behind him*] At last.

[*A silence. A long one.*]

[*SIDNEY returns to the kitchen. Conversation is heard as he opens and closes the door. He starts hunting round the*

*kitchen opening drawers and not bothering to shut them.  
After a second, the door opens again, and JANE comes in]*

JANE: [*as she enters*] Yes, well you say that to Lottie, not to me. I don't want to know that ... [*She closes the door*]  
What are you doing? Oh, Sidney, what are you doing?  
[*She hurries round after him, closing the drawers*]

SIDNEY: Bottle-opener. I'm trying to find the bottle-opener.  
I can't get the top off Lottie's bitter lemon.

JANE: It's in there.

SIDNEY: In there?

JANE: Why didn't you ask me?

SIDNEY: Where in there?

JANE: On the mantelpiece.

SIDNEY: The mantelpiece?

JANE: It looks nice on the mantelpiece.

SIDNEY: It's no use having a bottle-opener on a  
mantelpiece, is it? I mean, how am I ...?

[*The door chimes sound*]

JANE: Somebody else.

SIDNEY: All right, I'll go. You open the bitter lemon. With  
gin.

JANE: Gin and bitter lemon.

SIDNEY: And shake the bottle first.

[*SIDNEY opens the door. Silence from the room. He goes  
out, closing it*]

JANE: [*to herself*] Gin and bitter lemon-shake the bottle  
first-gin and bitter lemon-shake the bottle first ... [*She  
returns to the door and opens it very slightly. There can  
now be heard the chatter of five voices. She closes the  
door and feverishly straightens herself*]

[*The door opens a crack and SIDNEY's nose appears.  
Voices are heard behind him*]

SIDNEY: [*hissing*] It's them.

JANE: Mr and Mrs Brewster-Wright?

SIDNEY: Yes, Ronald and Marion. Come in.

JANE: Ronald and Marion.

SIDNEY: Come in.

[SIDNEY *opens the door wider, grabs her arm, jerks her through the door and closes it*]

JANE: [*as she is dragged in*] Gin and bitter lemon-shake the bottle first ...

[*Silence. Another fairly long one. The door bursts open and JANE comes rushing out*]

[*Murmur of voices*]

[*Over her shoulder*] Wait there! Just wait there! [*She dashes to the sink and finds a tea towel and two dish cloths*]

[RONALD, *a man in his mid-forties, enters. Impressive without being distinguished. He is followed by an anxious SIDNEY. RONALD is holding one leg of his trousers away from his body. He has evidently got drenched*]

SIDNEY: Oh dear oh dear. I'm terribly sorry.

RONALD: That's all right. Can't be helped.

JANE: Here's a cloth.

RONALD: Oh, thank you - yes, yes. [*He takes the tea towel*]  
I'll just use this one, if you don't mind.

SIDNEY: Well, what a start, eh? What a grand start to the evening. [*With a laugh*] Really, Jane.

JANE: I'm terribly sorry. I didn't realize it was going to splash like that.

RONALD: Well, tricky things, soda siphons. You either get a splash or a dry gurgle. Never a happy medium.

JANE: Your nice suit.

RONALD: Good God, it's only soda water. Probably do it good, eh?

JANE: I don't know about that.

RONALD: [*returning the tea towel*] Thanks very much.  
Well, it's wet enough outside there. I didn't expect to get wet inside as well.

SIDNEY: No, no ...

JANE: Terribly sorry.

RONALD: Accidents happen. Soon dry out. I'll run around for a bit.

SIDNEY: I'll tell you what. I could let you have a pair of my trousers from upstairs just while yours dry.

JANE: Oh, yes.

RONALD: No, no. That's all right. I'll stick with these. Hate to break up the suit, eh? [*He laughs*]

[*So do SIDNEY and JANE*]

[*MARION, a well-groomed woman, a little younger than RONALD and decidedly better preserved, comes in*]

MARION: All right, darling?

RONALD: Yes, yes.

MARION: Oh! [*She stops short in the doorway*] Isn't this gorgeous? Isn't this enchanting.

JANE: Oh.

MARION: What a simply dishy kitchen. [*To JANE*] Aren't you lucky.

JANE: Well ...

MARION: It's so beautifully arranged. Ronnie, don't you agree? Isn't this splendid.

RONALD: Ah.

MARION: Just look at these working surfaces and you must have a gorgeous view from that window, I imagine.

SIDNEY: Well ...

MARION: It must be stunning. You must look right over the fields at the back.

SIDNEY: No-no.

JANE: No, we just look into next door's fence.

MARION: Well, which way are the fields?

JANE: I've no idea.

MARION: How extraordinary. I must be thinking of somewhere else.

SIDNEY: Mind you, we've got a good ten yards to the fence

...

RONALD: On a clear day, eh?

SIDNEY: Beg pardon?

MARION: Oh look, Ronnie, do come and look at these cupboards.

RONALD: Eh?

MARION: Look at these, Ronnie. [*Opening and shutting the cupboard doors*] They're so easy to open and shut.

JANE: Drawers—here, you see ...

MARION: Drawers! [*Opening them*] Oh, lovely deep drawers. Put all sorts of things in these, can't you? And then just shut it up and forget them.

SIDNEY: Yes, yes, they're handy for that ...

MARION: No, it's these cupboards. I'm afraid I really do envy you these. Don't you envy them, Ronnie?

RONALD: I thought we had cupboards.

MARION: Yes, darling, but they're nothing like these. Just open and shut that door. It's heaven.

RONALD: [*picking up a booklet from the counter*] Cupboard's a cupboard. [*He sits and reads*]

JANE: [*proudly*] Look. [*Going to the washing machine*] Sidney's Christmas present to me ...

MARION: [*picking up the air freshener from the top of the washing machine*] Oh lovely. What is it? Hair spray?

SIDNEY: No, no. That's the fly spray, no. My wife meant the machine. [*He takes the spray from her and puts it down*]

MARION: Machine?

JANE: Washing machine. Here ...

MARION: Oh, that's a washing machine. Tucked under there. How thrilling. What a marvellous Christmas present.

JANE: Well, yes.

MARION: Do tell me, how did you manage to keep it a surprise from her?

SIDNEY: Well ...

MARION: I mean, don't tell me he hid it or wrapped it up. I don't believe it.

SIDNEY: No, I just arranged for the men to deliver it and plumb it in.

JANE: They flooded the kitchen.

MARION: Super.

JANE: You see, it's the automatic. It's got-all the programmes and then spin-drying and soak.

MARION: Oh, good heavens. Ronnie, come here at once and see this.

RONALD: [*reading avidly*] Just coming ...

MARION: [*bending to read the dial*] What's this? Whites-coloureds-my God, it's apartheid.

JANE: Beg pardon?

MARION: What's this? Minimum iron? What on earth is that?

JANE: No, minimum iron.

MARION: Don't tell me it does the ironing too.

JANE: Oh, no, it ...

MARION: Ronnie, have you seen this extraordinary machine?

RONALD: Yes. Yes ...

MARION: It not only does your washing and your whites and your blacks and your coloureds and so on, it does your ironing.

SIDNEY: No, no ...

JANE: No ...

MARION: [*to JANE*] We shall soon be totally redundant. [*She picks up the spray and fires it into the air and inhales*] What a poignant smell. It's almost too good to waste on flies, isn't it. Now where ...? It's a little like your husband's gorgeous cologne, surely?

JANE: Oh, well ...

[*The doorbell chimes*]

MARION: Oh, good gracious. What was that? Does that mean your shirts are cooked or something.

SIDNEY: No, front doorbell.

MARION: Oh, I see. How pretty.

SIDNEY: Somebody else arrived.

JANE: Yes, I'd better ...

SIDNEY: Won't be a minute.

JANE: No, I'll go.

SIDNEY: No ...

JANE: No, I'll go.

[JANE *hurries out, closing the door*]

MARION: I do hope your Mr and Mrs Potter don't feel terribly abandoned in there. They're splendidly jolly, blooming people, aren't they?

SIDNEY: Yes, Dick's a bit of a laugh.

MARION: Enormous. Now, you must tell me one thing, Mr Hopcraft. How on earth did you squeeze that machine so perfectly under the shelf? Did you try them for size or were you terribly lucky?

SIDNEY: No, I went out and measured the machine in the shop.

MARION: Oh, I see.

SIDNEY: And then I made the shelf, you see. So it was the right height.

MARION: No, I mean how on earth did you know it was going to be right?

SIDNEY: Well, that's the way I built it.

MARION: No. You don't mean this is you?

SIDNEY: Yes, yes. Well, the shelf is.

MARION: Ronnie!

RONALD: Um?

MARION: Ronnie, darling, what are you reading?

RONALD: [*vaguely consulting the cover of his book*] Er ...

SIDNEY: Ah, that'll be the instruction book for the stove.

RONALD: Oh, is that what it is. I was just trying to work out what I was reading. Couldn't make head or tail.

MARION: Darling, did you hear what Mr Hop-er ...

SIDNEY: Hopcroft.

MARION: Sidney, isn't it? Sidney was saying ...?

RONALD: What?

MARION: Darling, Sidney built this shelf on his own. He went out and measured the machine, got all his screws



and nails and heaven knows what and built this shelf himself.

RONALD: Good Lord.

SIDNEY: I've got some more shelves upstairs. For the bedside. And also, I've partitioned off part of the spare bedroom as a walk-in cupboard for the wife. And I'm just about to panel the landing with those knotty pine units, have you seen them?

MARION: Those curtains are really the most insistent colour I've ever seen. They must just simply cry out to be drawn in the morning.

[JANE *sticks her head round the door*]

JANE: Dear-it's Mr and Mrs Jackson.

SIDNEY: Oh. Geoff and Eva, is it? Right, I'll be in to say hallo.

MARION: Geoff and Eva Jackson?

SIDNEY: Yes. Do you know them?

MARION: Oh yes. Rather. Darling, it's Geoff and Eva Jackson.

RONALD: Geoff and Eva who?

MARION: The Jacksons.

RONALD: Oh, Geoff and Eva Jackson. [*He goes and studies the washing machine*]

MARION: That's nice, isn't it?

RONALD: Yes?

JANE: Are you coming in?

SIDNEY: Yes, yes.

MARION: Haven't seen them for ages.

JANE: They've left the dog in the car.

SIDNEY: Oh, good.

MARION: Have they a dog?

JANE: Yes.

MARION: Oh, how lovely. We must see him.

JANE: He's-very big ...

SIDNEY: Yes, well, lead on, dear.