

CHARACTERS

Mrs Reece: elegant, bossy, enterprising; 50s.
Thelma: quick-tempered prima donna; late 40s.
Gordon: long-suffering stage manager, frozen-faced and monotonous when acting; age immaterial.
Felicity: nervous, well-meaning but incompetent actress; late 20s.
Mercedes: phlegmatic yet dogged; not young.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

PROLOGUE

ACT I

A London street
 Scrooge's counting-house
 Outside and inside Scrooge's house
 Christmas past:
 A market-town
 Another part of the town
 A warehouse
 Back at Scrooge's house
 Bob Cratchit's house
 Fred's house

ENTR'ACTE

ACT II

Scrooge's again
 Christmas yet to come:
 Still at Scrooge's
 Bob Cratchit's house
 A graveyard
 Once more at Scrooge's
 A London street
 Return to Bob Cratchit's house
 Return to Fred's house

MUSICAL NUMBERS

It's Because It's Christmas Scrooge
It's Because It's Christmas (Reprise)
 The music for these songs is given on pages 51 to 62

Please note a licence issued by Samuel French Ltd to perform this play only includes permission to use the above-mentioned songs and does NOT include permission to use any other overture and incidental music specified in this copy. Where the place of performance is already licensed by the Performing Right Society a return of the music used must be made to them. If the place of performance is not so licensed then application should be made to the Performing Right Society, 29 Berners Street, London W1.

A separate and additional licence from Phonographic Performances Ltd, Ganton House, Ganton Street, London W1, is needed whenever commercial recordings are used.

Character	Plays
Thelma	Ebenezer Scrooge
Mrs Reece	Tiny Tim, Fred's Wife, Ghost of a Gentleman, Mrs Dilber, Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come
Mercedes	Bob Cratchit, Belle, A Boy
Gordon	Mrs Cratchit, Jacob Marley, Half of Ghost of Christmas Present, Ghost of Christmas Past, Mr Fezziwig
Felicity	Half of Ghost of Christmas Present, Fred, Little Fan, Old Joe

Other Farndale Avenue comedies by
David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jnr
published by Samuel French

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic
Society Murder Mystery

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic
Society's Production of *Macbeth*

The Haunted Through Lounge and Recessed Dining Nook at Farndale
Castle

They Came from Mars and Landed Outside the Farndale Avenue Church
Hall in Time for the Townswomen's Guild's Coffee Morning

PROLOGUE

Christmas decorations in auditorium. The backdrop on stage is a Victorian Christmas card scene painted on gauze. Spotlit DR is an easel bearing a giant book marked "A Christmas Carol". There is a microphone on a stand

Christmas carols are playing as the audience come in. Mrs Reece, elegant, middle-aged chairman of the Dramatic Society, shows them to their seats and sells programmes, each of which contains a slip of paper to be used for the game of charades. She wears a tinsel brooch on her evening gown. She tells individual members of the audience that she is worried about the non-arrival of most of the cast. The music fades, she mounts the stage and takes the microphone. She waves it around, only holding it to her mouth intermittently. Consequently, the following is all that can be heard:

Mrs Reece Merry Christmas, everyone—oh, it's working! I'm never awfully sure what to do with these things. I remember I was in Lytham St Annes ... had to have it surgically removed ... waving it about ... finally stuck it up the front of his ... and naturally you couldn't hear a word he said. Now there's something terribly important I want to tell you, and that's ...

Tremendous rumbling over the PA caused by Mrs Reece putting the microphone in her handbag while she rummages through it for notes

Gordon (off) Hold the mike!

Mrs Reece I've only got one pair of hands, you know.

Gordon (off) Closer.

Mrs Reece No, it's unhygienic. Now did you all hear what I said about the cast not turning up tonight? (*To one person*) You didn't? Why not? Everybody else did. Well, all I said was that the cast were supposed to be here half an hour ago, but they're stuck in a traffic jam in (*inaccessible place*). So we're going to be able to kick off in another three-quarters of an hour. If we're lucky. It's such a bind, I know. But perhaps you'd like to read your programmes. Thank you.

Mrs Reece exits

The following exchange, off, is heard through the PA

(*Off*) Gordon.

Gordon (off) What?

Mrs Reece (off) What do I do with this microphone?

Gordon (off) Just leave it there. You'll need it for the narration, won't you?

Mrs Reece (off) Oh, yes. (*She tunelessly hums a Christmas carol*)

Gordon (off) Mrs Reece.

Mrs Reece (off) Yes?

Gordon (off) Are they all just going to sit there?

Mrs Reece (off) I should imagine so. They've paid.

Gordon (off) You can't leave them there on that horrible seating.

Mrs Reece (off) It's not horrible seating.

Gordon (off) It's horrible.

Mrs Reece (off) There's nothing the matter with the seating.

Gordon (off) My sister-in-law can't sit there for forty-five minutes. She's got a swelling.

Mrs Reece (off) She'll just have to lump it. I'm sorry. We can't do *A Christmas Carol* without Scrooge.

Gordon (off) You can do what Mrs Pilsner suggested.

Mrs Reece (off) Don't be ridiculous, Gordon. We're not doing that.

Gordon (off) Why not?

Mrs Reece (off) Because . . . oh, all right.

Pause

Mrs Reece enters

Hello again. Could you just tear yourselves away from your programmes for a moment? This is just a shot in the dark, but . . . has anyone here ever played Scrooge? For another Society perhaps? The Strolling Thespians did it last Christmas. Are any of them here? No? Well, what can you expect? We didn't go to see them. Oh, dear. Look, can anyone look miserly? Anyone at all? (*To 1st Person*) What about you? Is a grasping old skinflint within your range? Say "humbug". No, not handbag, humbug. Yes, that's not bad. Are you about a thirty-eight inch bust? Yes, the costume would fit you. Would you mind reading this? I just want to make sure you've grasped the underlying complexities of the role. In your own time, dear. And nice and loud.

1st Person "Dear Reg, No milk today or tomorrow, thanks. Could you leave two pints and large double cream Sat? All the best, Phoebe."

Mrs Reece Sorry, can I have a look at that? Oh! What *am* I doing? I meant to put that in the bottle when I left this morning. Fiddle! Still, you read it very well, dear. I'll tell you what: read it through again to yourself and try to make it a bit more . . . miserly. And while we're waiting . . . (*To 2nd Person*) Would you like to have a go? I saw you there trying to attract my attention. As if to say, "I could be an old tightwad, given half a chance". I think I've got a bit of script here somewhere. There we are. I think that's it. Off you go.

2nd Person "Szanowna pani, Piszę do pani z zapytaniem, czy jakies panie z Farndale Avenue Townswomen's Guild bylyby zainteresowane wzięciem udziału w Międzynarodowym Festiwalu Tupperware, który obędzie się w Warszawie

Be stingier,
dear.

(*To the audience*)
Is it me? I

Mrs Reece Speak up,
dear. Can't
hear you.

dnia 18 czerwca. W skład programu wchodzi między innymi odczyt na temat rozwoju hermetycznych pokrywek . . ."

Mrs Reece You're not foreign, are you? Oh. Are—you—an exchange-student? Yes? Well, full marks for effort. Don't you agree, everyone? Come on make her feel at home. That's the ticket. (*To 1st Person*) And how are you getting on with your exercise? You're looking a bit more tight-fisted, I must say. Read me something while you're in the mood.

1st Person "Dear Reg, No milk today or tomorrow, thanks . . ."
Mrs Reece Well done! You *have* been working hard, haven't you? I don't know what to do now. We're spoilt for choice, aren't we? I mean you (*indicating 2nd Person*) want to do it, don't you? I can tell. But the costume would fit you (*1st Person*). What a dilemma. Well, there's only one thing for it. We'll have you.

She chooses 3rd Person

Gordon, will you bring me Thelma's costume, please? (*To the audience*) This is really the only man for the job. He's had the experience, you see. He's what we call an old pro. You've been in show business for simply ages, haven't you? Well, you told me you had. You said you lived next door to Frankie Vaughan's brother.

Through the auditorium doors, in street clothes, burst Thelma, middle-aged, bad-tempered prima donna; Felicity, a nervous young housewife; and Mercedes, a phlegmatic woman rendered almost inert by her neck brace

Felicity Have they started?

Thelma She wouldn't dare. It's more than her life's worth.

Mrs Reece Is that them?

Felicity We couldn't help it, Mrs Reece. The traffic's been murder.

Thelma Two solid hours we've been crawling through blasted road-works. **Mrs Reece** (*to 3rd Person*) It's all right. You've been reprimed.

Thelma The Council seems to forget that some of us have vocal warm-ups to do. Of course you can't expect . . . what are you doing with that man?

Mrs Reece What man, dear?

Thelma Why did you tell him he's reprimed?

Mrs Reece You misheard, dear. I didn't say reprimed. I said, "I bet you're relieved now Thelma's here . . ."

Thelma (*to 3rd Person*) Did she ask you to play my part?

Mrs Reece Thelma, it's unthinkable that anyone except you could play Ebenezer Scrooge.

Gordon enters with Thelma's Scrooge costume

Gordon Here's Thelma's costume if you want to give it to that bloke in the . . . oh, my God.

Without stopping Gordon turns and exits

Thelma's mouth falls open

Mrs Reece You've ironed that beautifully, Gordon. We were keeping it as a surprise, Thelma, but never mind. Take her to the star dressing-room, will you, Felicity? Because Thelma's fans are dying to see her as crotchety old Ebenezer . . .

Felicity Which one's the star dressing-room?

Mrs Reece Next to the boiler-room, dear. And make sure the rabbits don't get out.

Felicity drags Thelma away

Well, you know, Christmas comes but once a year. . . .

Mercedes Better late than never, eh, Mrs R?

Mrs Reece Steady as you go, dear. Need any help?

Mercedes What do I need help for? Nothing the matter with me!

Mrs Reece You're looking better in yourself.

Mercedes Yes, I just get the occasional white hot flash of searing agony.

Mrs Reece You're an example to us all, Mercedes. This is my friend, Mercedes, ladies and gentlemen. She's playing Bob Cratchit and a schoolboy.

Mercedes Wouldn't miss it for worlds.

Mrs Reece And after all you've been through. Remind me, dear: how many supermarket trolleys were involved in the pile-up?

Mercedes Twenty-seven.

Mrs Reece What a dreadful business. Let's not dwell on it.

Mercedes And I came off better than some.

Mrs Reece Yes, I read the coroner's report.

Mercedes It's Mrs Van den Berg I feel sorry for. She was on the operating table five hours having that tin of corned beef removed. And for what? Because I can't see her mounting a lawn mower again.

Mrs Reece I'm inclined to agree. Still, we must press on.

Mercedes You don't know what she puts on her snapdragons, do you?

Mrs Reece I think . . .

Mercedes The woman at the upholsterers, you know, with the leg, told me they thrived on baked apple *compote*, but Ulysses said she was having me on.

Mrs Reece I think I heard someone calling you, dear.

Mercedes Somebody wants me?

Mrs Reece Yes, backstage. I think they need you to lead the work-out.

Mercedes Ooh, I'd better get a move on.

Mercedes exits with agonizing slowness

Mrs Reece Best foot forward, dear. *(To the audience)* Well, I can't remember what I was talking about now. Have I mentioned our adventure weekend on Dartmoor? Would anyone be interested? What about you, Mercedes? No, perhaps not. It's more for the daredevil really. Those who don't mind a bit of rough-and-tumble. We get up to all sorts of high jinks, I can tell you. There's a beetle drive. And we have expeditions. There's

one to the post office. But that's quite a long way so we usually just go to the end of the road. And, if wet, we have hunt the thimble. I suppose it's not really advisable for those with high blood pressure. Although there is always a state registered nurse in attendance. And I think that's about it on the whole. I expect you'll want to mull it over. What's next? There's nothing else, is there? Apart from the play. Would you like to see it now? It's terribly good. The costumes are gorgeous.

Voice Bravo, Mrs Cav!

Mrs Reece Yes! Hear! Hear! Mrs Cavendish really has excelled herself this year. It's true. Some of these costumes look like real clothes. So it is with great pleasure that I give you—what's it called?—*A Christmas Carol*. Thank you. *(Indicating the microphone stand)* Does this stay here?

Gordon *(off)* No. You take it off.

Mrs Reece All right. Don't snap.

Mrs Reece exits with the microphone stand

The spot goes out and the House Lights go down. "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" is heard at a variety of different speeds, then fades under Mrs Reece's voice. A spot comes up on the book

Gordon enters to turn the pages

(Off, through PA) Is it still on? One, two, three, one, two, three. All right, how am I supposed to know? I'm not psychic.

Gordon opens the cover of the book. Written on the first page, in florid handwriting, is "Once upon a time . . ." Gordon turns the page. Written on the second page is "Marley was dead, to begin with"

(Off, through the PA) Marley was . . .

Gordon turns the page, revealing a blank page

(Off, through the PA) Gordon, that's too quick. Turn it back.

He does so

(Off, through the PA) Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt . . . all right! You can turn it now.

Gordon turns the page, then the blank page, revealing the third page which reads "The end"

(Off, through the PA) There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by . . . Gordon!

Gordon What?

Mrs Reece *(off, through the PA)* You've turned over too many pages.

Gordon That's all there is.

Mrs Reece *(off, through the PA)* Gordon, you are a ninny! Can anyone believe this man is supposed to be a stage-manager? Adrian, can you turn that light out, please? I can't be bothered with him any more.

The spot goes out

Gordon It's not my fault.

Mrs Reece (*off, through the PA*) Get off, Gordon. And take that book with you.

Gordon exits with the book and easel

(*Off, through the PA*) Where was I? Marley was dead, to begin with

(*Off, through the PA*) Where was I? Marley was dead, to begin with . . . er . . . this is all about him being dead . . . ah, yes! Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scrippling, vulturing, foveitous old dinner? Who typed this? External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him.

ACT I

A merry peal of church bells leads abruptly into "The Troika" from Prokofiev's Lieutenant Kije

The Lights come up below the gauze revealing Felicity dressed as a Snowman C Mrs Reece enters in bobble hat and long, woollen scarf, carrying an armful of snowballs

Mrs Reece Come, Betsy. As it is Christmas Eve, let us have fun in the snow. Ha-ha-ha-ha! (*She throws snowballs*)

Mercedes enters, similarly dressed, at snail's pace. She tries to throw a snowball at Mrs Reece, but cannot lift her arm. She eventually lobs the ball about six inches

Mercedes That will teach you.

Mrs Reece Oh, you rotter. That went right down my neck. But I know it was meant only in fun. Ha-ha-ha-ha!

Gordon is seen in the wings

Mercedes Ha-ha-ha-ha!

Mrs Reece Hist, Betsy! Here comes our friend, Albert. Let us give him a surprise.

Mercedes Yes, let us.

Gordon enters also in winter clothes, carrying gift-wrapped parcels. Mrs Reece throws snowballs at him

Mrs Reece Take that, Albert!

Mercedes makes another pathetic attempt at throwing

Mercedes And that.

Gordon Well, you two certainly gave me a surprise. But now I have one for you.

Mrs Reece Look out, Betsy. Albert has got a huge one.

Gordon realizes he has forgotten to bring on snowballs

Gordon I've come on without my balls.

Felicity, hitherto immobile, turns and looks at him. In desperation Gordon throws one of his parcels and knocks Felicity over. Mrs Reece tries to help her up. Mercedes is no help at all

Mercedes Well, I have never seen one quite like that.

Gordon And now who is this coming along? Why, it is our old friend, Santa.