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Chase Me Up Farndale Avenue, s'il vous plaît!

A comedy

David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jnr

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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Murder Mystery

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

We Found Love and an Exquisite Set of Porcelain Figurines Aboard
the *SS Farndale Avenue*

CHASE ME UP FARNDAL AVENUE, S'IL VOUS PLAIT!

The original version was first presented on 16th August, 1982 at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. This revised version was first presented at the Palace Theatre, Newark, on 2nd March, 1993, with the following cast of characters:

Mrs Reece (playing Frank and Mary Carrott; an Animal)	Norma Howard
Thelma (playing Brigitte Charot; Jack and Norah Garrett)	Teresa Selfe
Felicity (playing Constance Barrett; Fifi and Jojo)	Anna MacNeil
Minnie (playing Roger Parrot; Jacques Charot)	Debby Holden
Gordon (playing George Barrett; Virginia Parrot)	Robert Joyce

Directed by David McGillivray

Designed by Gerald Tagg and Walter Zerlin Jnr

CHARACTERS

Mrs Reece: elegant, bossy, enterprising; 50s.

Thelma: quick-tempered prima donna; late 40s.

Felicity: nervous, well-meaning but incompetent actress; late 20s.

Minnie: scatty, good-natured, tubby; not young.

Gordon: long-suffering stage manager, frozen-faced and monotonous when acting; age immaterial.

AUTHORS' NOTE

Chase Me Up Farndale Avenue, s' il vous plaît! was the fourth in the Farndale Ladies' cycle. The original production of the play toured Britain in 1982 with a cast including Julian Clary as Mrs Reece, Deborah Klein (later half of the cabaret act Parker and Klein) as Thelma, and David McGillivray, who introduced the character of Gordon. At one point Thelma exclaims: "Quelle surprise!", which later became Julian's catch-phrase. For the revised version, we made several amendments, notably the addition of Thelma's stirring rendition of the French national anthem, and the Ladies' climactic cancan. Regrettably the plot is no easier to follow.

David McGillivray
Walter Zerlin Jnr
London, June 1993

PROLOGUE

The set represents two adjoining rooms in a small apartment house in the Champs-Élysées. It is a summer morning

There is a single bed in the room L. Also in this room is a door (A) UC, and a painted window L showing a view of the Arc de Triomphe. Downstage of the window is a table with a record-player on it

In the room R there are two doors UC; one (B) is upside-down, that next to it (C) is normal. There is a fourth door (D) DR with a practical handle on the hinged side. Upstage of this door is a tall, narrow cupboard. There are also two small tables; one is DC, the other — containing drinks, glasses and a telephone — is DR. There are upright chairs in both rooms. Paint and wallpaper are different in each room. Stage lights are to half

The House Lights are up. A selection from Offenbach's Orpheus in the Underworld is playing as the audience enters. They are greeted by the Chairman of the Dramatic Society, Mrs Reece, and her second-in-command, Thelma, who carry tricolours

When most of the audience is seated, Felicity enters through door D as Fifi the maid. She carries a Hoover, which she plugs in and begins pushing round. Sound effect of a Hoover, which makes Mrs Reece look at the stage in surprise. Sound effect of the telephone ringing. Fifi switches off the Hoover and the noise stops. Fifi picks up the telephone receiver

Fifi 'Allo! Ici les Chambres du Oo-la-la, an apartment 'ouse...

Mrs Reece clears her throat very loudly. When Fifi breaks off, Mrs Reece shakes her head at her. Fifi looks perplexed. Mrs Reece makes shooping motions with her hand

But Minnie said to come on.

Mrs Reece There might be a few more people yet, dear.

Fifi Minnie said there wouldn't be any more.

Mrs Reece Yes, but there might. Now go away.

Fifi But Minnie said to come on early because you wanted to catch the end of [programme showing on television tonight].

Mrs Reece Look, if Minnie told you to put your hand in the fire, would you do that?

Fifi But she's been organizing everything.

Mrs Reece Oh, has she now? Well, perhaps you'd like to tell her that I'm the Chairman of the Society, thank you very much. Now just go back in the wings and I'll tell you when we're ready.

Fifi What will you say?

Mrs Reece I'll tell you to come on.

Fifi Yes, but will you use those actual words?

Mrs Reece Yes, I'll say "Come on now". All right?

This seems to satisfy Fifi, who takes the Hoover and exits through door D

Mrs Reece (to *Thelma*) Terribly keen!

Thelma That girl shouldn't be acting.

Mrs Reece But she has such enthusiasm, *Thelma*.

Thelma She can be enthusiastic backstage.

Mrs Reece Not so loudly, dear.

Thelma Why can't she help Joyce with the sound?

Mrs Reece Because she shows great promise as a performer.

Thelma Oh, come on, *Phoebe*.

Mrs Reece It's true.

Thelma Come on now!

Fifi dutifully enters through door D with the Hoover, which she plugs in

Mrs Reece You're forgetting how delightful she was as one of the witches in *Macbeth*.

Thelma She came on early in that as well.

Mrs Reece No, she didn't.

Thelma Yes, she did. She came on in the dagger scene.

Mrs Reece Only fleetingly.

Fifi switches on the Hoover. Sound effect of the Hoover. Sound effect of the telephone. Fifi switches off the Hoover and picks up the telephone receiver

Fifi 'Allo! Ici les Chambres du Oo-la-la, an apartment 'ouse ——

Mrs Reece (interrupting) Felicity! Not yet, Felicity!

Fifi But you said it.

Mrs Reece Joyce, will you turn that tape recorder off?

The Hoover noise stops

Joyce (*off*) Aren't we starting?

Mrs Reece Felicity, can I have a word with you, dear? If you really think it's a good idea to do the play with the rest of the cast still drinking tea in the dressing-room, well, all right, we'll give it a try.

Fifi No, I don't want to do that, Mrs Reece.

Mrs Reece You don't? You don't want to do a one-woman show?

Fifi No.

Mrs Reece In that case I'll tell you when we're ready.

Fifi You'll be sure to tell me, will you?

Mrs Reece Yes, dear, I'll be sure to tell you. I know, we'll have a code, shall we? What shall we have? I'll say...ooh...*The Sound of Music*, and then you come on.

Fifi *The Sound of Music*.

Mrs Reece Yes.

Fifi turns to leave

Don't forget your Hoover, dear.

Fifi takes it and exits through door D

The House Lights go down. Mrs Reece mounts the stage

Well, good-evening, ladies and gentlemen, and to our honoured guests from France I'd like to say "Bonsoir, mesdames et monsieurs et bienvenue en [*name of town*]."

Audience Bonsoir!

Mrs Reece Voulez-vous me joindre dans l'interval pour une tasse de thé et un ginger nut, s'il vous plaît? Bon!

Gordon appears at an auditorium door and argues noisily with Thelma

Mrs Reece For those of you who are unaware, [*name of town*] has been twinned with [*same name of town*]-sur-Mer in the south of France. Members of the [*same name of town*]-sur-Mer Dramatic Society are with us tonight for our French-flavoured evening. Ssssh! And Thelma and I will be returning the compliment when we visit the French Riviera next month. I don't know if it's of any interest, but I found this wonderful new sun tan lotion, which...Gordon, what is it?

Gordon Thelma's taken my ——

Mrs Reece Not while I'm talking.

Gordon But she's taken my eyeliner.

Mrs Reece Not now.

Gordon You can't leave anything lying around this place.

Gordon exits, grumbling

Mrs Reece Good old Gordon. He's in a bit of a flap because tonight he's not only our stage manager. He's also going to be doing some acting! Good news for everyone who saw him last year as Beth in *Little Women*. I can see our French guests are looking a little puzzled now! It's probably not the case in France, but in this country ladies such as us sometimes have male members. So there's something you can put on your postcards! Now tonight, as I say, we're off on a fun-packed trip to gay Paree. But this isn't the first time the Society has gone Continental. Older members will recall with pleasure such lovely plays as Good Night Vienna, Toodle-Pip Bratislava and Cavey Girls! It's Fräulein Humperdink. And recently we have been exercising hitherto untried skills as we ventured forth into the musical. Music-lovers will have cause to remember Naughty Marietta, The Student Prince and...er...I seem to have lost the next page. What was that other musical we did? Famous one. With all the nuns. Set in Austria.

Audience *The Sound of Music.*

Mrs Reece The what?

Audience *The Sound of Music.*

Fifi enters through door D with the Hoover and plugs it in

Mrs Reece No, not that one. Oh, I remember: Gay Nuns of Salzburg. I was a nun in that. I was *the* nun in that. You were a nun as well, weren't you, Thelma?

Thelma No.

Mrs Reece What were you?

Thelma A yodelling burgomaster.

Fifi switches on the Hoover. Sound effect is heard. Turning, Mrs Reece glares icily at Fifi until she notices

Fifi seems to be on the point of tears as she runs out through door D

Mrs Reece (*shouting over noise of the Hoover*) I think one or two of our younger members are a little over-excited by our gala evening. And by the sound of it our tape recorder's playing up again. Joyce, are you having trouble, dear? Can you give her a hand, Malcolm? We're being Hoovered to death down here.

Sound effect stops

Ah, success. That's Joyce as always on the tape recorder. And she's up there with Malcolm, that's Thelma's husband, who's switching the lights on and off for us. They really have been working like demons. Last week they were in that little box together every night until I don't know when —

Thelma Not last week, Phoebe. We didn't have rehearsals last week.

Mrs Reece Yes, but they did. I saw them.

Thelma Last week? But ... Malcolm told me he was greasing his pistons...

Mrs Reece Well, I'm not one to gossip. Anyway, keep up the good work, you two. And now let's settle back for a good laugh.

Mrs Reece and Thelma exit through door C. Mrs Reece enters

We present *Chase Me Up Farndale Avenue*, s'il vous plaît! Thank you.

She exits uncertainly

A burst of Hoover noise, which cuts off abruptly

Mrs Reece (off) Felicity! Felicity!

Fifi (off) What?

Mrs Reece (off) We're ready!

Fifi (off) You didn't say it.

Mrs Reece (off) Felicity! Everybody's waiting.

Mrs Reece puts her head round the door

I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen. Je suis très désolé.

She disappears again

Fifi (off) You were going to say *The Sound of Music*. You told me you were going to say —

Mrs Reece (off) Felicity, this is ridiculous. There's an empty stage out there —

Fifi (off) You must say *The Sound of Music*.

Mrs Reece (off) All right! *The Sound of Music*! There, said it, made you happy?

Fifi (off) Some people in this society are so amateurish.

She strides angrily through door D and grabs the Hoover

She simmers for a moment then goes R and kicks the socket. There is a flash. Fifi jumps back with a scream and clutches her leg

When it is apparent that she is not going to continue, Mrs Reece's arms, making beckoning movements, appear from door D

Mrs Reece (off) Come off! Come off, dear!
Fifi I've been burnt! I can't walk!

Mrs Reece edges on, helping Fifi off

Mrs Reece Give me your hand. Everything's going to be all right. Gordon, go and get some butter, will you?

Much commotion off as Fifi is helped through the door

(To the audience) We've had a minor accident, ladies and gentlemen. I'm afraid our electrician has a little difficulty with plugs. He's colour blind. but we'll be starting again in a minute...

Gordon (off) We haven't got any butter, Mrs Reece.

Mrs Reece There's some [brand of margarine] on Joyce's sandwiches. Can you scrape it off?

Gordon (off) Joyce!

Mrs Reece Don't use the fish paste ones. She'll end up smelling like a pilchard.

She hurries out of door D. During the ensuing dialogue, she can be seen through the open door trying to get Fifi on to her feet

Fifi (off) Aaahhh!

Mrs Reece (off) Felicity, dear, you can't lie here. This is an exit.

Fifi (off) But it's the stabbing pain, Mrs Reece.

Mrs Reece appears

Mrs Reece (to the audience) I suppose the orthopaedic surgeon didn't come tonight, did he? No, too much to expect.

Fifi (off) Mrs Reece!

Mrs Reece I'm here, dear.

Mrs Reece disappears

(Off) Minnie, give me a hand. This leg has got to go higher than her head.

Minnie (off) No, no, no, Mrs Reece. Her head's got to go between her knees.

Mrs Reece (off) But not backwards, dear, surely? Come on let's get her on her feet. One, two, three...

Crash and groan off

(Off) Butterfingers.

Gordon bursts in through door C with a plate of sandwiches

Gordon I've found Joyce's sandw — *(He is horrified when he sees the audience)* Oh, my God. This is the stage ...

Thelma appears in the doorway behind him. She holds a stick of make-up

Thelma Here's your bloody eyeliner. It was in your toilet bag.

Gordon I said I didn't want anyone going through my private toilet bag!

Thelma Don't worry, I won't touch the smelly old thing again.

This argument continues as Gordon edges out of door C. Mrs Reece enters through door D, crosses swiftly to door C and closes it on the disturbance

Mrs Reece Now in a way I'm glad we've stopped, ladies and gentlemen, because it gives me an opportunity to draw your attention to an alteration in the programme. The parts of Roger Parrot and Jacques Charot will not be played by Verity Wheatcroft. Many of you will know that Verity is no longer with us due to a difference of opinion. And I don't want to add any more than that. Except to say that no-one could accuse us of being mean with the chocolate digestives. But luckily Minnie Robinson, who's one of Mrs Cav's team in Wardrobe, has stepped into the breach, and I know she's going to be an absolute scream. Although, of course, she will be reading from the script. So bear with us. *(Into the wings)* Is the patient approaching recovery? Yes? Oh, splendid. *(To the audience)* Nous commence!

She backs through door D

The Lights L fade to Black-out

ACT I

The Lights R come up to full

Fifi (off) I can't find the Hoover!

More consternation backstage: running feet, cries of "Who's moved it?", etc.

Thelma opens door C, looks directly at the vacuum cleaner

Thelma (as she goes) It's not here.

Thelma exits

Mrs Reece (off) Go on without it!

Fifi (off) I can't!

Mrs Reece (off) Mime it!

Fifi enters through door D, whining, with her leg bandaged. She sees the vacuum cleaner

Fifi (calling off) It was here all the time. Sorry.

Groans backstage. Fifi limps over to the vacuum cleaner. She switches it on and begins manoeuvring it but there is no sound effect. This is heard some moments later. Then the telephone rings. Fifi switches off the vacuum cleaner, but the sound continues. Fifi limps uncertainly to the telephone and picks up the receiver

'Allo! Ici les Chambres du Oo-la-la, an apartment 'ouse ... er ... one moment, s'il vous plaît. (Shouting) I will turn down ze 'oovair.

She takes a step towards the vacuum cleaner, but the noise stops. She returns to the telephone

Ici les Chambres du Oo-la-la, an apartment 'ouse in ze Champs-Élysées populair wiz Englishmen spending business weekends in Paris. Je suis Fifi ze maid. 'Oo iz zat? Mais oui, Madame Barrett, I will give your 'usband

a message avec plaisir. You 'ave decided to join 'im 'ere in Paris and will arrive at four o'clock. Bon. Merci. Au revoir. Ah, non! Wait, wait, wait! Did you say you were Madame Barrett, wife of ze Englishman 'ere in room twenty-three, or Madame Parrot, wife of ze ozair Englishman next door in room twenty-four? Oh, sacrebleu. She is gone. *(She hangs up)* Ah, Barrett, Parrot — it is so confusing for Fifi. I sink she say "Parrot". I will write Monsieur Parrot a note.

She picks up a notepad and pencil, which breaks. She is wondering what to do when Gordon hands a second pencil from the wings DR

Gordon *(off)* Psst!

Fifi quickly takes the pencil, which breaks

Fifi Encore, s'il vous plaît.

Gordon *(off)* There's no more.

Pause

Fifi Non, I will not write a note. *(She throws the pad away)* I will ... send a telegram. *(She picks up the telephone)* 'Allo, telegrams? Please tell Monsieur Parrot zat 'is wife will join 'im 'ere at four o'clock. Merci beaucoup. *(She hangs up)* And now I must do ze dusting.

She pulls out a duster, but the vacuum cleaner effect is heard. Fifi replaces the duster

I will do ze dusting wiz ze 'oovair.

She Hoovers, bending down very low and looking anxiously over her shoulder at door D

After some scuffling Minnie is pushed through it. She is dressed in male attire as Roger Parrot, but has forgotten to take her pincushion off her wrist. She is reading a script and throughout the play will not have the faintest notion what is going on or where she is supposed to be. She stands by the door nervously turning pages

Pinch my bottom.

Mr Parrot What?

Fifi Pinch my bottom.

Parrot remains baffled

Top of page two.

Parrot finds the place, moves over to Fifi and pinches her bottom. Fifi stands up as if surprised. The vacuum cleaner noise stops

Mr Parrot Mon Dieu! I 'ave been assaulted.

Fifi That's my line. Mon Dieu! I 'ave been assaulted.

Parrot moves DL. Fifi pulls him back

Monsieur Parrot, it is you. What are you doing 'ere? You 'ave rented ze room next door.

As soon as Parrot starts to speak, he moves away again out of Fifi's reach

Mr Parrot The view is better in here, my little French pastry. One kiss, I implore you.

Fifi Non, monsieur! Take your 'ands off me! Let me go, let me go!

Parrot is nowhere near her. Fifi moves to him

Fifi (*sotto voce*) Kiss me.

Mr Parrot (*shaking his head*) No, I'm not doing that.

Fifi slaps him round the face. Parrot drops his script and fumbles for it

Fifi I will not let you take advantage of me. You are a married man.

Mr Parrot Where are we?

Fifi Page two.

Mr Parrot This must be our room, Frank.

Fifi Page two.

Mr Parrot I feel better now so let's sign the contracts.

Fifi finds the place for him

Fifi But my wife is a hundred miles away in London!

Mr Parrot But my husband ——

Fifi Wife!

Mr Parrot — is a hundred miles away in London.

Fifi Zat is what you sink, monsieur. Regardez-vous ze message on zat table.

As Parrot turns towards the telephone table, Fifi remembers with horror that there is no message there. Parrot searches on and under table for the message. His attention is attracted by:

Gordon peers from the wings

Gordon (*whispering*) Imagine it.

Parrot does so, putting the script under his arm, picking up an imaginary letter and studying it. Meanwhile Fifi, who has not seen this business, goes to the door C, and knocks on it surreptitiously

Fifi 'Oo is it? (*Ventriloquial; gruff*) Telegram! (*Normal*) Ah, bon. (*She opens the door and pretends to take delivery of a telegram*) Merci.

She hands the imaginary telegram to Parrot

'Ere is ze message, monsieur.

Mr Parrot (*referring to the imaginary letter*) What's this then?

Fifi What?

Mr Parrot This.

Fifi There's nothing there.

Parrot throws away the imaginary letter

(*Referring to an imaginary telegram*) Look at this.

Mr Parrot What?

Fifi This.

Mr Parrot There's nothing there either.

Fifi Imagine it.

Parrot does so

Gordon's hand waves a real piece of paper from the wings

Gordon Use this.

Mr Parrot (*referring to the imaginary telegram*) What's this then?

Gordon What?

Mr Parrot This.

Gordon There's nothing there. Read this,

Mr Parrot (*looking at the paper*) There's nothing on it.

Gordon Read the script!

Gordon exits

Mr Parrot (*reading the script*) "Reading message. My wife is coming here. What shall I do? I told her I was going to St Andrews for a golfing holiday whereas in reality I'm spending the weekend here with my mistress Brigitte. Knocking is heard off."

A knock at door D. Fifi pulls Parrot c

Gordon enters as George Barrett

Mr Barrett Good lord, if it isn't Roger Parrot. Fancy seeing you here.

Mr Parrot Why, it's George Barrett, isn't it? We haven't met since we were at Cambridge together.

Mr Barrett That's right. You were reading English.

Mr Parrot And you were reading palae ... palnt ... I can't read this.

He shows it to Fifi

Mr Barrett That's all behind me now. In recent years I've been in property. In fact I'm here in Paris with my secretary Mrs Carrott to complete a major business deal. What about you?

Mr Parrot Palaeontology.

Mr Barrett Yes.

Mr Parrot Is it me?

Fifi Yes.

Mr Barrett What about you?

Mr Parrot Oh, yes. Why, it's George Barrett, isn't it? We haven't met since we were at Cambridge together.

Mr Barrett That's right. You were reading English.

Mr Parrot And you were reading ... I've said this before, haven't I?

Fifi (*pointing at the script*) What about you ... monsieur?

Mr Parrot I'm spending a dirty weekend with my mistr ... pauses realizes he mustn't say mistress I mean my wife.

Mr Barrett A weekend with your wife! Then why were you making eyes at that gorgeous maid who was here a few moments ago?

Hearing this, Fifi frantically collects the vacuum cleaner and exits through door D

Mr Parrot You must be mistaken, George.

Mr Barrett Well anyway, why don't you pour us a couple of drinks, old man?

Hungry for More?

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