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A CHRISTMAS CAROL

A Comedy

by David McGillivray and
Walter Zerlin Jnr

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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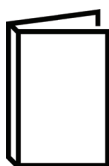
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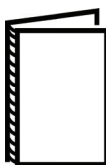


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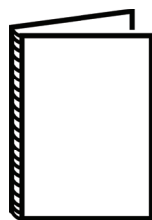
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jnr

David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jnr formed the touring theatre company Entertainment Machine in 1975. The following year their play *The Farndale/Macbeth* was performed on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to such acclaim that a further nine *Farndale* plays ensued. Most are published by Samuel French.

The final play, *The Farndale/Peter Pan*, was left unfinished following the death of Zerlin in 2001. It was completed by McGillivray in 2013.

**THE FARNDAL AVENUE HOUSING ESTATE
TOWNSWOMEN'S GUILD DRAMATIC SOCIETY'S
PRODUCTION OF
A CHRISTMAS CAROL**

First produced at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe on 7th August, 1987, with the following cast of characters:

THELMA (playing EBENEZER SCROOGE)	Harriet Neave
MRS REECE (playing TINY TIM; FRED'S WIFE; A GENTLEMAN; MRS DILBER; THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME)	Jennifer Lautrec
MERCEDES (playing BOB CRATCHIT; BELLE; A BOY)	Erika Poole
GORDON (playing MRS CRATCHIT; JACOB MARLEY; HALF OF THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT; THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST; MR FEZZIWIG)	Martin Burrell
FELICITY (playing HALF OF THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT; FRED; LITTLE FAN; OLD JOE)	Janet Sate

Other parts played by members of the cast
Directed by David McGillivray

CHARACTERS

MRS REECE: elegant, bossy, enterprising; fifties.

THELMA: quick-tempered prima donna; late forties.

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

FELICITY: nervous, well-meaning but incompetent actress; late twenties.

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 80 to 89

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PROLOGUE

Christmas decorations in auditorium. The backdrop onstage is a Victorian Christmas card scene painted on gauze. Spotlit downstage right 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 (*offstage*) Hold the mike!

MRS REECE I've only got one pair of hands, you know.

GORDON (*offstage*) 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, offstage, is heard through the PA.

(*offstage*) Gordon.

GORDON (*offstage*) What?

MRS REECE (*offstage*) What do I do with this microphone?

GORDON (*offstage*) Just leave it there. You'll need it for the narration, won't you?

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Oh, yes. (*She tunelessly hums a Christmas carol*)

GORDON (*offstage*) Mrs Reece.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Yes?

GORDON (*offstage*) Are they all just going to sit there?

MRS REECE (*offstage*) I should imagine so. They've paid.

GORDON (*offstage*) You can't leave them there on that horrible seating.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) It's not horrible seating.

GORDON (*offstage*) It's horrible.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) There's nothing the matter with the seating.

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

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

GORDON (*offstage*) You can do what Mrs Pilsner suggested.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Don't be ridiculous, Gordon. We're not doing that.

GORDON (*offstage*) Why not?

MRS REECE (*offstage*) 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, Piszędo	MRS REECE Speak up,
pani z zapytaniem, czy	dear. Can't hear
jakieś panie z Farndale	you.
Avenue Townswomen's Guild	
byłyby zainteresowane	Be stingier, dear.
wzięciem udziału w	
Międzynarodowym Festiwalu	<i>(To the audience)</i>
Tupperware, który	Is it me? I can't
obdędzicie się w Warszawie	understand a word
dnia 18 czerwca. W skład	she's saying.
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 showbusiness 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 reprieved.

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 reprieved?

MRS REECE You misheard, dear. I didn't say reprieved. 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 (*offstage*) 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.*

(*offstage, 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".*

(*offstage, through the PA*) Marley was...

GORDON *turns the page, revealing a blank page.*

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

He does so.

(*offstage, 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".*

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

GORDON What?

MRS REECE *(offstage, through the PA)* You've turned over too many pages.

GORDON That's all there is.

MRS REECE *(offstage, 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 *(offstage, through the PA)* Get off, Gordon. And take that book with you.

GORDON *exits with the book and easel.*

(offstage, through the PA) Where was I? Marley was dead, to begin with.

(offstage, 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 squeexing, wrebching, gresping, scryping, vlutching, 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, centre.

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 lobes 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.

***THELMA** enters as Santa Claus, carrying a sack of parcels.*

THELMA Ho-ho-ho-ho! Have you been a good little girl this year? Did you hear what I said?

MRS REECE Yes perfectly, Santa, but I'm trying to re-build the snowman so don't get uppity with me, thank you very much.

FELICITY My pipe, get my pipe!

THELMA And what about you children? Have you been causing any mischief?

MERCEDES No.

GORDON Yes.

***MERCEDES** nudges **GORDON**.*

No.

THELMA Then here are some presents for you.

***MRS REECE** is prodding the pipe into **FELICITY**'s face.*

FELICITY No, that's my nose, Mrs Reece!

THELMA Well, merry Christmas, everyone!

*In swinging her sack on to her shoulder, she knocks
FELICITY over again.*

THELMA *exits.*

GORDON This is wonderful. Christmas is my favourite time of year. What do you say, girls?

MRS REECE } (together, half-heartedly) We agree.
MERCEDES }

*A piano thumps out the introduction to the song "IT'S
BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS". All sing thinly and dance
clod-hoppingly.*

IT'S BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS

ALL	WHY DO REINDEER LEARN TO FLY? IN THE SUMMER THEY WON'T TRY.
FELICITY	IT'S BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS, CHRISTMAS TIME AGAIN.
ALL	WHY DO TURKEYS GET DEPRESSED? I'LL TELL YOU IF YOU HAVEN'T GUESSED:
FELICITY	IT'S BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS, CHRISTMAS TIME AGAIN.
ALL	WHY DO WE BRING TREES INDOORS WHEN THEY SHOULD BE OUTSIDE GROWING? WHY ARE THE WINDOWS LINED WITH SNOW THOUGH IT ISN'T SNOWING? WHY ARE CANDLES BURNING BRIGHT? AND WHY DO WE SING "SILENT NIGHT"? IT'S BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS, CHRISTMAS TIME AGAIN. WHY ARE PUDDINGS SET ON FIRE? WHY HAS GRANDMA JOINED THE CHOIR?
FELICITY	IT'S BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS, CHRISTMAS TIME AGAIN.
ALL	WHY DO WE KISS PEOPLE WE DON'T KNOW WHEN WE'RE STANDING UNDER MISTLETOE? IT'S BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS,

JUST BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS,
IT'S BECAUSE IT'S CHRISTMAS, CHRISTMAS TIME AGAIN.

MERCEDES That was fun. I so enjoy singing about Christmas.

GORDON So do I.

MRS REECE I have an idea. Let us try to cheer up the meanest man in London.

MERCEDES You mean Ebenezer Scrooge?

MRS REECE Yes, and...

GORDON You mean Ebenezer Scrooge?

MRS REECE Yes, and here he is now.

THELMA *enters as SCROOGE.*

MRS REECE	}	<i>(together)</i> Merry Christmas, Mr Scrooge!
GORDON		
MERCEDES		

SCROOGE Bah! Humbug!

Blackout.

MRS REECE *exits.*

MRS REECE *(offstage, through the PA)* Scrooge pushed past the young urchins and made his way to his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather and the fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole.

The lights come up below the gauze. GORDON, MERCEDES, FELICITY and THELMA have not moved. They look aghast.

FELICITY Ooh, no! Not yet!

THELMA We can't see a thing, Phoebe!

MRS REECE *appears round the wings.*

MRS REECE I know, dear. Adrian, it's too dark. We can't have a blackout with the lights off, can we?

THELMA We should have rehearsed the scene changes.

MRS REECE It's all right, Thelma. We're doing it again. Thank you, Adrian. One more time, please.

Blackout. Thuds and crashes.

THELMA What *is* he playing at?

MRS REECE This is not much of an improvement, dear.

The lights come up below the gauze.

MRS REECE *is holding a hardboard cut-out of a pot-bellied stove. GORDON is dragging on a high stool and a hardboard cut-out of a high Dickensian desk. FELICITY has fallen over MERCEDES, who is crawling on the ground. THELMA storms off. MERCEDES begins making her way off.*

Adrian, the lights are on now and they should be off. We want them off, but on. Aren't I speaking English? Where's that exchange student? Can you try and make him understand? It seems perfectly simple to me.

FELICITY We want the lights on when they're off – I mean not like when they're on, like now, but just not off so that they're not on.

MRS REECE Felicity, I don't think the snowman would appreciate the subtleties of stage lighting, do you?

FELICITY He might do.

MRS REECE Go and get changed.

She shoves her off.

FELICITY *exits.*

Adrian, you're not being cussed for the sake of it, are you? Saints alive, even the snowman knows what I mean. Will you stop reading that magazine when I'm talking to you? *(To the audience)* I'm sorry, we *are* still doing the play. I'm just consulting my technical man.

MRS REECE *exits.*

GORDON *tries to make Adrian laugh by "hanging" himself with his scarf.*

(offstage) Adrian, you're going to make me swear in a minute. We need some light during the blackout to see what we're doing. Now just push something or other. And give me that disgusting thing. I've a good mind to tell your mother.

MRS REECE *enters holding a magazine normally found on a newsagent's top shelf.*

Just a little misunderstanding... *(To GORDON)* Stop it! ...I think we've sorted it out now. All right, Adrian, blackout...

The lights quickly fade.

But leave them on!

The lights remain at half.

Heaven be praised.

Music: "HAVE YOURSELF A MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS".

MRS REECE *sets the stove far right and exits.* **GORDON** *sets the high, Dickensian desk and high stool right and exits.* **SCROOGE** *enters, sits at the desk and pretends to write with a quill.*

A spot comes up on the desk. The music stops.

SCROOGE Ninepence three farthings, tenpence halfpenny, elevenpence farthing! Splendid. I have saved almost a shilling this year by touching up my own roots. Now I

must investigate the possibility of selling home-made jam without the fruit.

Bell, off.

Cratchit, you're late. What time do you call this? Don't give me any of your excuses. Cratchit!

MERCEDES *enters, at her customary pace, as* **BOB CRATCHIT**.

CRATCHIT All right, hold your horses.

SCROOGE Why are you late?

CRATCHIT Didn't hear the cue.

SCROOGE You may be quick-witted, Cratchit, but you must learn that time is money. I shall dock fourpence from your wages this week.

CRATCHIT Sorry I'm late, Mr Scrooge.

SCROOGE There's no point in running to your desk now. The damage is done. Put some coal on the fire. But only one lump, mind. Just because it's Christmas, there's no need to be extravagant.

CRATCHIT All right. Don't rush me.

SCROOGE Don't stand there warming your hands, man! Go and make my tea.

CRATCHIT Flipping heck.

SCROOGE When I was your age we didn't have fires to warm ourselves by. And we didn't have flower-arranging classes either. We just had to throw the blooms into the vase higgledy-piggledy, but

CRATCHIT *reaches the stove, takes a large piece of coal out of his pocket, but cannot bend down to open the door and throw it inside. He taps on the stove. The door is opened from the inside and* **MRS REECE's** *bangled arm reaches out. CRATCHIT puts the coal in her hand, but it is too large for her to take through the stove door, and*

we were glad of the
opportunity to
experiment. You young
people today, with your
magic lanterns and
your curling tongs, you
have it far too easy.

*so she returns it to him and
he gives her a smaller piece,
which is the right size.*

CRATCHIT Thank you.

MRS REECE You're welcome.

She closes the stove door.

SCROOGE And you didn't warm the pot before you made this tea.

CRATCHIT It's coming, it's coming.

CRATCHIT *exits.*

A bell is heard, off.

FELICITY *enters as SCROOGE's nephew* **FRED.**

FRED Good morning, uncle. And a merry Christmas to you.

SCROOGE Humbug!

FRED Humbuggle, uncle...lumbuggle...lunc? You don't mean that, I am sure?

SCROOGE I do. Every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. One lump or two?

FRED One, if you please.

SCROOGE Still watching your figure, eh, nephew?

FRED Yes, unlike you, uncle, I am not blessed with a firm and well-proportioned body.

SCROOGE (*prompting*) And perfect skin.

FRED And perfect skin. What charming, hand-painted crockery.

SCROOGE Yes, Cratchit fires it in his lunch hour. He's a little treasure really. Cratchit!

CRATCHIT *enters with a tray of tea.*

CRATCHIT Yes, I haven't forgotten. I had a bit of a spasm in the dressing-room. I'll be all right. One sugar with no tea, Mr Scrooge?

SCROOGE Take it away and do the washing-up, Cratchit.

CRATCHIT You what?

He pours the tea – an immensely noisy and messy business – regardless of the ensuing dialogue.

FRED That welcome refreshment reminds me of the reason for my visit, Uncle. Will you dine with us tomorrow?

SCROOGE Dine with you?

FRED Well, it will be nothing fancy. The au pair has gone back to Oslo for the holidays. Shall we say one o'clock for cocktails?

SCROOGE Say what you like. But your idle merriments will be conducted in my absence. I hate Christmas and all celebrations of the confounded season. If I had my way, people who invite other people to Christmas dinner would be strung up to the ceiling with their own paper chains.

FRED Well, you don't have to make your mind up now. Just drop in if you are passing. It is Liberty Hall round at our place.

SCROOGE Bah!

FRED And bring a bottle.

SCROOGE Good morning, nephew!

FRED *exits.*

CRATCHIT *(offering tea)* Would your nephew like a cup?

SCROOGE Cratchit, take a letter.

CRATCHIT We've done the tea, have we?

CRATCHIT *exits with the tray of tea.*

SCROOGE To Messrs Goodbody and Wimble: “Gentlemen, unless our account is settled within the next seven days, I shall be forced to put the matter into the hands of my solicitors. Yours, etc., etc.” Read that back to me, will you, Cratchit?

CRATCHIT (*offstage*) Can’t find the pen.

SCROOGE And see who that is at the door.

The sound of a bell being rung and then dropped.

MRS REECE *enters as a GENTLEMAN with a tray of flags and a collecting tin.*

GENTLEMAN Joyce! Be careful with that bell. It’s my budgie’s.

SCROOGE State your business and be quick about it.

GENTLEMAN I am a poor crippled boy.

SCROOGE What?

GENTLEMAN Oh, no. That’s when I’m Tiny Tim. Em...have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge or Mr Marley?

SCROOGE Mr Scrooge died seven years ago, this very night. I am Mr Marley... Scrooge, I mean. It’s Marley who’s dead... of course.

GENTLEMAN Yes, easy mistake to make. Can I trespass upon your generosity?

SCROOGE Don’t shake that tin at me.

The GENTLEMAN shakes the empty tin, then shakes it next to his ear.

GENTLEMAN (*into the wings*) Who took the pesetas out of the tin?

SCROOGE Forget the pesetas!

GENTLEMAN It’s all very well to say “Forget the pesetas”, Thelma, but when I go to Marbella, I want a bit of loose change if

you don't mind. (*Into the wings*) All right, turn out your pockets.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

SCROOGE Cratchit! I want that letter read back to me. Right this minute. Do you understand?

CRATCHIT (*offstage*) I can't lay hands on the notebook now. Have you got something I can use as a notebook, Gordon?

The GENTLEMAN enters with the tin, which he rattles proudly at SCROOGE.

GENTLEMAN Sorry, wrong tin. What was that your clerk just asked me?

CRATCHIT enters writing with a coat-hanger on Adrian's indecent magazine.

CRATCHIT "Gentlemen, If your account is not settled..."

SCROOGE Shut up.

GENTLEMAN I'm collecting for the poor, sir. At this festive season of the year, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for them.

SCROOGE Are there no workhouses?

GENTLEMAN Plenty of prisons, yes, sir.

SCROOGE And the prisons, are they in operation?

GENTLEMAN Yes, and the workhouses are as well.

SCROOGE And what about the...prisons?

GENTLEMAN You've said that.

SCROOGE Well what about the...

CRATCHIT (*prompting*) Treadmill and the Poor Law.

GENTLEMAN Both very busy, sir.

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