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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**

A Comedy

by David McGillivray and
Walter Zerlin Jnr

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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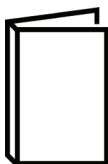
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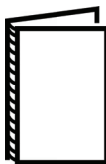


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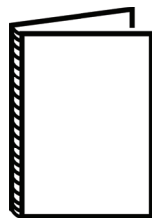
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.

**THEY CAME FROM MARS
AND LANDED OUTSIDE
THE FARNDALE AVENUE CHURCH HALL
IN TIME FOR THE
TOWNSWOMEN'S GUILD'S COFFEE MORNING**

First produced at the MacRobert Arts Centre, Stirling, on 8th August 1986, with the following cast of characters:

MRS REECE (playing PROFESSOR EINSTEIN)	Jennifer Lautrec
THELMA (playing JIMMY & SUSAN ALLSOPP)	Cindy Lee Wright
GORDON (playing REVEREND ALLSOPP)	Jon Trevor
FELICITY (playing MRS ALLSOPP and INDESIT THE MARTIAN)	Janet Sate
NORAH (playing MRS TOMPKINS and ROBERTA THE ROBOT)	Dawn Toms

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.

NORAH: cheerful, capable, latterly semi-conscious; not young.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

PROLOGUE

ACT I

The vicarage

ENT'RACTE

ACT II

Scene One Outer space

Scene Two Mars

PROLOGUE

Music with astronomical associations (“BLUE MOON”, “CATCH A FALLING STAR”, “FLY ME TO THE MOON”, etc.) plays. The stage is empty. When most of the audience are seated, MRS REECE, elegant middle-aged Chairman of the Dramatic Society, bustles in with programmes. She is more anxious than usual. Music fades.

MRS REECE I’m terribly sorry about the delay, everyone. The Slimmers’ Club were in here before us and, when I asked them to withdraw, they started throwing their weight about. Not a pretty sight. Anyway it’s put us dreadfully behind and that’s why we still haven’t got our scenery up. Oh, hello! I’m so glad you could come. This is one of the authors, ladies and gentlemen. We’ve had so much fun with your piece. I hope you don’t think we’ve taken too many liberties. The only reason we changed the setting from a nuclear power station to the vicarage is that we had the scenery left over from the Agatha Christie. Waste not, want not. And talking of scenery, everyone, we’re going to have to put our stuff on the stage now so – please – no staring. Or there’s always that remote possibility that someone might make a mistake. Those of you who have nothing to do can go and give your names to Mrs Wolstenholme, who’s organizing a petition to make purple rinses available on the National Health. And if anyone wants reading material I’ve got bags of programmes here. Sorry about the creased ones. I caught my granddaughter’s guinea pig trying to make a nest out of them. *(Calling)* You can bring the things on now, ladies. But remember: fairy footsteps. We don’t want to know you’re there.

MRS REECE continues selling programmes and does not look at the stage again. Music. Holding a curtain on a

rod (curtain A), which hides them from the view of the audience, **GORDON** and **THELMA** enter left, carrying a table, which they deposit centre before exiting right. **GORDON** and **THELMA** enter right with curtain A concealing **NORAH**, who is carrying an ironing board and curtain B. The ironing board is placed upside-down on the table. **NORAH** exits right behind curtain B. **GORDON** and **THELMA** exit left behind curtain A, then immediately enter and take the ironing board off right. Simultaneously **FELICITY**, holding a vacuum cleaner, enters left behind curtain C, and **GORDON** and **THELMA** enter right behind curtain A. **FELICITY** deposits the vacuum cleaner centre and exits right. **GORDON** and **THELMA** take the table off left, then immediately enter behind curtain A and take the vacuum cleaner off right. **GORDON** and **THELMA** enter right with curtain A concealing **NORAH** with the ironing board. Holding curtain A, **GORDON** and **THELMA** exit left, leaving **NORAH** doing the ironing. Simultaneously **FELICITY**, holding curtain C, enters right, and **GORDON**, holding curtain B, enters left. **FELICITY** and **GORDON** meet centre below the ironing board. Simultaneously **FELICITY** begins to exit right and **GORDON** begins to exit left. Realizing that **NORAH** is still on stage, **FELICITY** and **GORDON** re-join their curtains C, then exit right with **NORAH** and the ironing board. Holding curtain B, **GORDON** enters right with **FELICITY** holding a hardboard shark. They move to centre. Holding curtain D, **THELMA** enters left with a bucket, which she places below curtain B. Holding curtain C, **NORAH** enters right with a plastic sack marked “**GORDON**’s make-up”, which she places below curtain D. Almost immediately **GORDON** and **NORAH** exit left and **THELMA** exits right, revealing **FELICITY** holding the shark. **MRS REECE** sees her. Music stops.

Which scene is that in, dear?

FELICITY Which scene is what in?

MRS REECE Take it off.

FELICITY We've just brought it on.

MRS REECE Get rid of it, dear. Quickly.

FELICITY clears the stage while MRS REECE is talking to the audience.

You see? This is what comes of staring at her. Please! Read your programmes. Do not look at the stage. Or there's no knowing what'll come on next. That lady there! Eyes down! If we end up with Birnam Wood I'll hold you personally responsible. Of course some of us can remember when theatres had curtains, can't we? It's not like the old days, is it? I mean this is very nice, but you wouldn't want to come here for a night out, would you? Anyone else want a programme? No? Well, I think we'll start the play then. Now, as you can see, our set is rather elaborate this year, and we have Mr Cheshire to thank for constructing the swimming pool. It looks magnificent, doesn't it? But all it consists of is six dozen bin-liners held together with Evostik. And we fill it by attaching Mr Cheshire's garden hose to one of the taps in the gentlemen's... *(She looks behind her, does a double-take and surveys the empty stage in disbelief)* Felicity!

NORAH *(offstage)* Felicity!

FELICITY *(offstage)* What?

NORAH *(offstage)* Mrs Reece wants you.

FELICITY *(offstage)* Now what?

MRS REECE Quickly as you can, dear.

FELICITY *(offstage)* I'm trying to get changed.

FELICITY appears.

What's wrong?

MRS REECE It's a minor point. As you may know we're doing a play here tonight and, at first glance at any rate, there would appear to be nothing on the stage.

FELICITY (*mystified*) Yes.

MRS REECE Felicity, we're starting in thirty seconds. Bring everything in the wings on to the stage.

FELICITY You told me to take it off!

MRS REECE (*to the audience*) It's her first time on props. (*To FELICITY*) One of the authors is here tonight. You're showing us all up. Now will you bring everything out here this minute?

FELICITY Everything?

MRS REECE (*to the audience*) We won't be much longer. (*To FELICITY*) Yes, everything! (*To the audience*) And I'm sure we're all going to have a lovely evening. Thank you.

MRS REECE *exits.*

Music.

FELICITY *turns wearily into the wings and returns carrying something which she sets on stage. She repeats this action until she has filled the stage, not only with items we have already seen, but also all manner of domestic items, theatrical paraphernalia and general junk, the more incongruous the better. The collection must include a table or desk with a drawer, three chairs and a picture.*

When there is barely room to move, FELICITY exits.

Music and house lights fade.

ACT I

The Vicarage in Farndale Avenue.

The lights come up on what is supposed to be the drawing-room of the Farndale Avenue Vicarage.

Standing bemused amidst the bric-à-brac is the housekeeper MRS TOMPKINS, played by the cheerful and resourceful NORAH.

There is the sound effect of a vacuum cleaner. MRS TOMPKINS searches everywhere for the real thing, but can't find it. As a last resort she begins doing the ironing. Sound effect of the telephone ringing. MRS TOMPKINS can't find that either. In desperation MRS TOMPKINS picks up the iron and holds it to her ear.

MRS TOMPKINS Hello? Yes, this is the vicarage, but the Reverend Allsopp ain't available at present because he's over at the church hall, where the Townswomen's Guild's having their coffee morning. I'm Mrs Tompkins, the housekeeper's vicar these past twenty years. Can I be of any assistance? Cor, bless you, sir, of course I know the professor. He's the lodger's vicar – vicar's lodger, but I can't disturb him at the moment because he's in the laboratory in the basement mixing up a top-secret formula. What's that? Yes, I can give him a message. Hold on while I get the notepad. *(She looks in vain for the prop and finally picks up a portrait of "The Laughing Cavalier", which she puts on the ironing board)* Here we are, sir. Now where did I put that pencil?

A hand from offstage passes her a broom. She attempts to manipulate this.

Sorry about that, sir. It was behind my ear all the time. Can I have your name? Lawks! Begging your pardon, sir, but is that *the* Jack Braithwaite, star reporter on the *Guildford Bugle*? Gulp! This is an honour and no mistake. You'll be wanting an interview with the professor, I expect? Very good, sir. What time shall I say you'll call? In an hour. Well, that'll be at – hold on a tic, sir. I'll just have a peek out of the french windows at the old church clock. (*She looks round somewhat hopelessly for the aforementioned flats*) We seem to have mislaid the french windows just at the moment. And I think the old church clock's done a bunk and all. Still, you pop round whenever you can, sir, and I'll put the kettle on. If I can find it. Bye-bye. Well, I'll just arrange these flowers and then I'll take a dip in the pool.

We hear someone blowing into a microphone in an attempt to suggest the sound of a flying saucer landing. The effect becomes wheezier.

Where's that earsplitting noise coming from?

VOICE (*offstage, gasping*) Ooh! Ran out of breath.

MRS TOMPKINS It sounds like something's landing in the garden.

VOICE (*offstage*) I can't do this tomorrow, Gordon. Not with my asthma.

MRS TOMPKINS Joyce, they can hear you.

VOICE (*offstage*) What's the next cue, love?

GORDON (*offstage*) Doorbell.

MRS TOMPKINS Joyce!

VOICE (*offstage*) Oh, that's on the next page. Hand us that birthday cake. I'll do the icing.

MRS TOMPKINS No, just put the jam in the sponge. I'll ice it later.

VOICE (*offstage*) Come again, love?

MRS TOMPKINS I said just put the... (*She places hand to mouth as she realizes*) ...turn the microphone off, Joyce.

VOICE (*offstage*) Right you are.

Click.

MRS TOMPKINS Cripes! There's...and don't bother with the icing... Cripes! There's something coming down all right and it ain't Mary Poppins neither. Ah! What's that blinding light?

An inoperative electric torch is pushed through the drapes upstage.

GORDON (*offstage*) Hang on.

MRS TOMPKINS It's hurting my eyes. I can't look.

GORDON (*offstage*) Torch won't work.

Pause.

MRS TOMPKINS Shall I say "The sun must be exploding"?

GORDON (*offstage*) In a minute.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Use these.

GORDON (*offstage*) Is that all there is?

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Hurry up! They're waiting.

GORDON's hands appear through the drapes and strike a match. MRS TOMPKINS is looking elsewhere.

GORDON (*offstage*) Psst!

MRS TOMPKINS sees the match flame and shields her eyes.

MRS TOMPKINS Cor, strike a light! The sun's exploding.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Now blow it out before the Fire Officer sees it.

GORDON does so and withdraws.

MRS TOMPKINS Lummy, I must have had one over the eight.

Sound of a vacuum cleaner.

Strewth! There's the doorbell. *(She climbs over the junk to get left)*

FELICITY, *a nervous, incompetent young housewife, enters as INDESIT, a Martian, in a ludicrous costume that includes what is obviously a tarded-up motorcycle helmet.*

If you want the coffee morning, miss, it's over at the church hall.

INDESIT *(gruffly)* I am a Martian. I come from Mars.

MRS TOMPKINS Ooh, that's a fair old way, ain't it? Still, I told them the word would get round if they went over to Gold Blend.

INDESIT You are woman who cleans?

MRS TOMPKINS Yes, three mornings a week.

INDESIT So my spies were correct. You will come with me.

MRS TOMPKINS Where to, miss?

INDESIT In my spaceship to Mars.

MRS TOMPKINS Chance'd be a fine thing, young lady. As soon as I've run round with the Hoover, I've got to unblock the sink and rinse through a couple of cassocks.

INDESIT This is unim— *(She coughs)* I don't think I'll bother with that voice, Norah. It hurts my throat. This is unimportant. Follow me to spaceship and bring macramé patterns.

MRS TOMPKINS But I ain't got none.

INDESIT You make macramé without patterns?

MRS TOMPKINS Lord love-a-duck, no. I don't make macramé at all. It's a skilled art.

INDESIT There must be some mistake.

MRS TOMPKINS You want the Townswomen's Guild. Like I said, they're over at the church hall. They'll whistle you up a macramé owl as soon as look at you.

INDESIT Enough! I must radio for further instructions. (*She brings out a walkie-talkie and pulls out the aerial, which comes off completely*) Calling all Martians. There has been administrative error. Earthwoman cannot do macramé. I understand. Over and roger. (*To MRS TOMPKINS*) You are to be...er...

MRS TOMPKINS Neutralized.

INDESIT That's right.

MRS TOMPKINS Oh, no.

INDESIT *cannot get her ray-gun out of its holster.*

(*improvising*) Anything but that. Neutralized! That's the last thing I want to be. You're not going to neutralize me with that gun, are you?

INDESIT You are to be neutralized.

MRS TOMPKINS That's awful. What a thing to happen. There's too much jam on that sponge, Joyce. It'll come out the sides. Scrape some off.

While MRS TOMPKINS is talking into the wings, INDESIT frees the gun and points it at her.

That's better. Put the top on. Press it down lightly.

INDESIT (*sotto voce; to MRS TOMPKINS*) Freeze.

MRS TOMPKINS What?

INDESIT Freeze!

MRS TOMPKINS No, what does she want to freeze it for? We're having it after the interval. Oh, I see what you mean. (*She freezes*)

INDESIT *exits.* **GORDON**, *an awkward, stone-faced stage manager in an ill-fitting suit enters as the* **REVEREND ALLSOPP** *and reacts to the chaotic set.*

REVEREND ALLSOPP Morning, Mrs T. And what a grand morning it is to be sure. Ha-ha-ha-ha. Those ladies over at the church hall certainly are a cheerful lot. Do you know what one of them said to me? “No sugar for me, thanks, Reverend. I’m sweet enough as it is.” Ha-ha-ha-ha. That gave me a good laugh. Now where did I put the notes for my sermon? I thought I left them on the bureau. (*Into the wings*) I can’t find anything. I say! Mrs Reece!

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Get on with the play, Gordon.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Can’t find my notes.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Bureau!

REVEREND ALLSOPP Yes, but look.

MRS REECE *screams off.*

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Who made that mess on the stage?

REVEREND ALLSOPP It wasn’t me. It was Felicity.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) You’re supposed to be the stage manager, Gordon.

REVEREND ALLSOPP I was doing my make-up.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) And one of the authors is in tonight! How embarrassing.

REVEREND ALLSOPP I’ve got to have my notes, Mrs Reece.

Making tiny movements with her eyes and head, MRS TOMPKINS tries to draw ALLSOPP’s attention to where the notes are semi-hidden.

MRS REECE (*offstage*) Just say: “It’s all right. I’ve found them.”

REVEREND ALLSOPP It’s all right. Mrs Reece has found them.

He continues looking for them while MRS TOMPKINS continues, with bigger movements, to show him where they are.

Ah, yes. Tell me, Mrs T, how does this sound to you? He reads from notes. "As I looked up at the sky last night I was reminded of...something about it really big...and...something else I can't remember." Well, Mrs T? Give me your honest opinion. Mrs T, Mrs T, what's the matter, what's the matter? Good gracious, she seems to be in a catatonic stupor. *(He still hasn't approached, nor even looked at, the manically twitching MRS TOMPKINS)*

Nor does he look at FELICITY, who enters as MRS ALLSOPP, the vicar's wife. She is still wearing INDESIT's space helmet.

MRS ALLSOPP Ah, hello, darling. I thought I heard you come back. I've just been potting some geraniums.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Where'd you put my notes?

MRS ALLSOPP Herbert, you're as white as a sheet. Is anything wrong?

REVEREND ALLSOPP Yes, you haven't set my notes.

In desperation MRS TOMPKINS climbs over furniture in order to reach the notes, which she thrusts into REVEREND ALLSOPP's hands.

Oh, thanks.

MRS ALLSOPP What's the matter with Mrs T?

During the following, MRS TOMPKINS climbs back to her position.

REVEREND ALLSOPP She's completely lifeless.

MRS ALLSOPP Let me see. *(She climbs over the furniture to reach MRS TOMPKINS)*

REVEREND ALLSOPP (*noticing the superfluous helmet*) You've still got your helmet on.

MRS ALLSOPP I know. I can't get it off. Just forget about it. Mrs T, Mrs T!

REVEREND ALLSOPP It's no good. I've tried everything.

MRS ALLSOPP Have you tried everything?

REVEREND ALLSOPP Yes. It's no good.

MRS ALLSOPP And nothing did any good?

REVEREND ALLSOPP No. And I've tried everything.

MRS ALLSOPP We must do something.

MRS TOMPKINS (*prompting*) The line about the professor.

MRS ALLSOPP The line about the professor.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Maybe our lodger, the professor, will know what to do.

MRS ALLSOPP There's no time for that, darling. Maybe our lodger, the professor, will know what to do.

REVEREND ALLSOPP You stay here. I'll go.

MRS ALLSOPP No, I want to stay here with poor Mrs T. Will you go?

REVEREND ALLSOPP There's no time for that. I'll get the professor.

MRS ALLSOPP I'll tell the children to stay in their rooms. They mustn't see this.

THELMA, middle-aged, bad-tempered prima donna, enters as the ALLSOPPS' eight-year-old son JIMMY. During the ensuing dialogue MRS TOMPKINS resumes chattering into the wings.

JIMMY Morning, Mum. Did I hear Dad telling our lodger, the professor, that something terrible had happened?

MRS ALLSOPP Of course not, Jimmy. You must have been dreaming.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Professor! Come up here quickly. Something terrible's happened.

JIMMY Oh, flip and blow.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Language, my boy.

He and JIMMY are facing each other in a confined space.

JIMMY Sorry, Dad. Didn't see you there. It's just that it's so boring here at the vicarage for an eight-year-old like me. I want a bit of excitement.

MRS ALLSOPP Jimmy, put your school uniform back on this minute. You can't go swimming now.

JIMMY Oh, please, Mum. I'm boiling.

MRS ALLSOPP Come and give your mother a big kiss and a hug, Jimmy. There's something I want you to do.

JIMMY Right-o, Mum.

He and MRS ALLSOPP climb towards each other.

Who's responsible for this?

REVEREND ALLSOPP Don't look at me.

Mother and son embrace, JIMMY towering over the petite
MRS ALLSOPP.

MRS ALLSOPP My, you are getting a big boy, Jimmy.

REVEREND ALLSOPP You'll soon be as tall as your mother, young lad.

JIMMY Mum, Dad: when I grow up, shall I be able to go to whist drives like you?

MRS ALLSOPP Of course you shall, you little tinker. But right now I want you to take your crayons into the garden and design me a few loose covers for the patio suite.

JIMMY I will if you'll tell me something.

MRS ALLSOPP What's that, you young scamp?

JIMMY Why is Mrs T standing there as stiff and frozen as a statue?

Everyone waits for MRS TOMPKINS to finish her highly animated conversation. Eventually she realizes and freezes again.

MRS ALLSOPP What are we going to tell him, Benjie?

REVEREND ALLSOPP He'll have to be told the truth, Marlene

MRS ALLSOPP Of course. Jimmy, something terrible has happened.

JIMMY Wow! I must tell my beautiful elder sister, Susan, who's playing her cello in the conservatory. *(He begins climbing off right)*

MRS ALLSOPP Stop him, darling. He's making for the door.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Ah, just missed him. He ran out between my legs.

JIMMY is stranded on top of something.

JIMMY This is preposterous.

MRS ALLSOPP I'll sort it out in the interval, Thelma.

MRS REECE enters as the bald-headed PROFESSOR EINSTEIN. She is in a white coat and carries a test tube.

EINSTEIN Not so fast, you young whippersnapper. Where'd you think you're off to, eh?

MRS ALLSOPP Professor, thank goodness you're here.

EINSTEIN Sorry I've been such a long time, but I've been putting the last few ingredients in this top-secret formula.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Is this the new explosive you were telling me about, Prof?

EINSTEIN Yes, it's so powerful that one drop is enough to destroy the universe. (*He drops the test tube*) Never mind. I'll wipe it up later. Now what's all this I hear about something terrible happening?

MRS ALLSOPP It's Mrs T, Professor. Look!

EINSTEIN *climbs towards* MRS TOMPKINS.

EINSTEIN Easier said than done, isn't it?

REVEREND ALLSOPP Why are you shining that light into her eyes, Prof?

EINSTEIN Hang on a jiff, Gordon. Who do you think I am? Edmund Hilary?

JIMMY I've had enough of this, Phoebe. This perpetual embarrassment. I'm resigning as Social Secretary.

EINSTEIN Do try to stay in character, Thelma. We're supposed to be men. Oh, would you believe it? I've broken my best nail.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Why are you shining that light into her eyes, Prof?

EINSTEIN Oh, dear, he won't be happy till he gets an answer, will he? (*He brings out a torch pen, hurries the last few steps, trips and jabs the torch pen into MRS TOMPKINS' eye*)

MRS TOMPKINS Ow!

EINSTEIN Sorry, dear. Was that your eye?

MRS ALLSOPP Take your hand away. Let me see.

EINSTEIN (*to the audience*) I don't think it's anything serious.

REVEREND ALLSOPP Why are you shining—?

EINSTEIN Oh, all right, Gordon! For heaven's sake.

MRS TOMPKINS *is flailing about, threshing her arms.*

I'm just ascertaining that Mrs T is in suspended animation, unable to move a muscle.

MRS ALLSOPP We need some Optrex or something.

EINSTEIN (*into the wings*) Have you got an eyebath, Joyce? An eyebath, dear. There's too much water in that icing sugar.

MRS TOMPKINS I said I'd do the icing!

EINSTEIN Norah's doing the icing, dear. You concentrate on the sound cues.

MRS ALLSOPP I think you missed the eyeball.

EINSTEIN Oh, what a blessing. Although if I had poked it out you'd have been perfect casting for *Oedipus Rex*. But I mustn't be flippant.

JIMMY Gosh, Professor Einstein, what do you think happened to Mrs T to make her like that?

EINSTEIN Don't be alarmed, everyone, but I think she's in the thrall of an extra-testicle hypnosis.

JIMMY What does that mean?

EINSTEIN I'll explain, Jimmy. Come and sit on my lap.

A chair is found. EINSTEIN sits. JIMMY sits on his lap and bounces up and down.

No, no, no! Get up, Thelma. We agreed no bouncing.

EINSTEIN *sits on JIMMY's lap.*

You see, Jimmy, I have reason to believe we're not alone in the universe.

JIMMY Have the Martians landed?

EINSTEIN You're a bright boy, Jimmy. What do you want to be when you grow up?

MRS ALLSOPP *screams.*

JIMMY It's not your turn.

MRS ALLSOPP Sorry.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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