

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.