

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...

START

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

## Mercedes, Mrs. Reece

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.*

END

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 set 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!