

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

***The Night Before
Christmas***

by Charles Way

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Characters.

Jimmy Tibbs.
Gladys Pearce
Sam McCann.
Tomtemor
Tomtefar
George
Iris
Vi.
Frost.

The play is written for six actors. 3m 3f

Doubling:

Sam McCann\Frost.
Vi \Tomternor.
George\ Tomtefar

NOT LICENSED FOR PRODUCTION

Act One. Scene One. Dec 24th 1941. London. 4.30am

[Jimmy Tibbs is dreaming. He dreams of aeroplanes; searchlights, air raid warnings, Churchill's speeches and wartime music. Vi enters his bedroom-wearing her WAF uniform-holding a candle.]

Vi Jimmy?

Jimmy Who is it? Who's there?

Vi It's me you silly thing.

Jimmy Mum?

Vi You know what time it is? It's so late it's early.

Jimmy An air raid....

Vi Sshh. It's gone. Faraway.

Jimmy It was like, I was falling through a hole in the sky and I kept trying to grab things as they went by, strange things, but I couldn't hold on, and I was getting colder and colder as the air got faster and faster and the ground was rushing up to hit me.

Vi Hush now.

Jimmy I can't see your face. [She brings her face to the light] Grandma says candles are only to be used in emergencies.

Vi Isn't this an emergency? You dropping through a hole in the sky? Got a sweet?

Jimmy Fiery imps. Want one?

Vi Nah-they're for you. How is your Grandma? How's Granddad?

Jimmy They've gone all funny.

Vi How dy'a mean?

Jimmy Cold.

Vi Cold?

Jimmy Last night there was ice on the inside of the window. It was coming into the room. Long fingers of ice creeping under the window sill. I could see them.

Vi Hush now, hush. Come on get back to bed.

Jimmy Its too cold.

Vi It's Christmas-it's meant to be cold.

- Mum [She picks up a model plane on his bed] Still flies does it?
[Jimmy nods. She 'flies' it.]
- Mum Why haven't you painted it? Your Dad would have wanted you to paint it.
[Jimmy shrugs.]
- Jimmy Are you going to be here, for Christmas?
- Vi I told you, I'll try. Do my best.
- Jimmy That means your not coming. I can tell. That's why you haven't written.
[He goes back under the covers. Silence]
- Vi Here, do you remember that poem your dad made up? He use to say it every Christmas eve.
- Jimmy Some of it. We tried to learn it.
- Vi I remember it all, every single word. He would stand at the fireplace and put on a very posh poem voice.
- Jimmy Go on then, you say it.
[Jimmy comes out from under the bedclothes]
- Vi Twas the night before Christmas.
- Jimmy Twas?
- Vi Its poetry.
When all through the house
not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.....
- Jimmy That's not dad's bit.
- Vi Wait- his bits coming-
The children were rested all snug in their beds
whilst visions of sugar plumbs danced in their heads.
- Jimmy Sugar plumbs?
- Vi You sleep Jimmy Tibbs it will soon be day.
[He starts to drift back to sleep]
- Vi Snowy and silent the world seemed lost
under the gaze of cold Mister Frost.

the door of the world froze on it's latch
all for the want of a candle and match

[Vi blows out the candle]

[Snd Fx Vi's Voice]

But who is that coming? Wait watch and hark
one brave boy unafraid of the dark.
who with the light of a single beam
finds the gift giver lost in a dream.

[Jimmy falls asleep. His mother exits, leaving the candle and matches.]

Act one Scene Two.

[We hear another sounds cape , the sound of morning, but the lights don't rise because of the blackout. Jimmy's Grandmother, Iris enters and turns on the light.]

Iris Jimmy. Jimmy. Up . Up. What do you think this is, a hotel? Who's been tampering with my blackout? Jimmy?

[She opens the blackout and light floods into the room.]

Jimmy What?

Iris What you been up to?

Jimmy Nothing.

Iris Up. Up.

Jimmy Its freezing.

Iris Then get moving.

[He starts to dress]

Iris What's this?

Jimmy Its a candle.

Iris What did I tell you? What did Granddad tell you? Candles are only for emergencies. You'll burn us all to bits you will.

Jimmy You're hurting my arm.

[She lets go]

Iris I hardly slept last night Jimmy Tibbs and you know why, cos you was shouting again, in your sleep. Who are shouting at ? This war's not our fault you know. If you want to shout at someone shout at Mr. Hitler.

Jimmy I wasn't shouting.

Iris Yes you were I heard you, and you were sleep walking again, left all the doors open.

Jimmy There was an air raid. I was scared.

[She stops and stares at him]

Iris You know very well there was no air raid last night, none at all, not here, not nowhere, not last night.

Jimmy I heard the bombs, the house shook.

Iris There was no air raid, you can ask the BBC.

Jimmy But I heard it...

Iris If there was an air raid, we'd have gone outside into the shelter wouldn't we?

Jimmy Mum heard it too.

Iris Who's mum?

Jimmy Mum. My mum. She was here.

Iris Jimmy Tibbs--- as if my nerves weren't already shot to bits.

Jimmy She was here. She told me something--
'Twas the night before Christmas'- that was it.

Iris You know as well as I do, she's in Liverpool. She wasn't here and there was no air raid. For pity's sake, don't you think things are bad enough without you making up a pile of bad dreams.

Jimmy It wasn't a dream. She was here.

Iris No. No. No. She was not here. Oh Jimmy, why didn't you stay in the countryside with the other children? Why did you come back? You had no right coming back and.... and dreaming.

Jimmy I'll go then, I'll run away, if that's what you want.

[Upset, Iris exits]

Jimmy She was here- she was.
'Snowy and silent,
the world seemed lost
under the gaze
of cold Mr Frost.' [Exit Jimmy.]

Act one Scene Three

George Where's Jimmy?

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- Iris He'll be down in a minute.
- George There's a letter for him.....from Liverpool.
- Iris She should never have left him. She should have stayed . I can hardly cope.
- George What's for breakfast?
- Iris You know very well George. [She gives him some bread and butter]The last time he had a letter he went silent, for two whole days, but what's that to her, in Liverpool. Perhaps I should join up an'all, go back to nursing , be easier than this. What would she do then Hey?
- George Don't give it to him then, if its going to upset you.
[Enter Jimmy. Iris puts the letter away. She gives George a cup of tea.]
- George What's that?
- Iris Tea.
- George It looks like water.
- Iris We're out of tea , till next Wednesday.
- George So its water then?
- Iris Put some milk in it.
- George Fresh milk?
[She scowls at him and he scowls at the tea]
- George Powdered milk Jimmy. Powdered eggs. The whole world's turning to powder.
- Radio Announcer [Big Ben]This is the Home service of the BBC in London. Good morning.
- George + Iris Morning.
- Radio Ann This is the weather, for Dec 24, 1941, and this is Alvar Liddel reading it. The cold snap continues. The Met office said this morning that the freak weather conditions means that 1941 may not be a white Christmas after all. Officials say Its "Its too cold to snow" . However , freezing fog has meant a lull in enemy bombing. There were no air raids reported last night over London.
[Iris looks sharply at jimmy]
- Radio Ann The home office, is advising common sense as the temperature continues to drop. Two pairs of socks are better than one. Now for our allies in the north we have a brief summary of the news, in Norwegian.

The Night Before Christmas. Copyright. C. Way

[The news follows in Norwegian]

[George goes out and returns with a small Christmas tree and starts to chop of the branches]

Iris George?

George Yes dear.

Iris That's the Christmas tree. George!

George We've got no coal, so we'll use wood. You wouldn't want us to freeze to death would you boy, not on 'Christmas Eve'.

Iris There's plenty of wood around George, sticking out of bomb sites, without having to chop up the Christmas tree.

George If you think I'm going to take one stick, from those houses, you're mistaken. Those houses are peoples graves, and I don't want you playing in them neither.

[Jimmy lowers his head]

Iris Now look what you've done.

George No one told him to come back to London. He did it all on his own. So he's got to face up to things.

Iris George?

George They're going to light up Oxford street. They are, just because its Christmas bloomin Eve.

Iris So?

George So what is the point of making myself hoarse for the past three months , shouting. 'Put that light out. Put that light out.' Till I'm sick of the sound of me own voice. A thousand lights they're putting on for Jerry to aim at. Where's the common sense in that? 'Two pairs of socks'. That's about the limit of their common sense. We've even got the news in Norwegian.

[Silence]

George We've got to stand up to Mr Hitler Jimmy, you and me and Grandma. Just like your dad when he was alive. He was a brave man. My son was a brave man.

[Jimmy runs out]

George Jimmy!

Iris You're tired out George. Been up all night. Get some rest.

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