

A Christmas Carol Complete

by Stephen Temperley

Cast of Characters

SCROOGE

ACTOR 1 Timothy Cratchit

Beggar

Ignorance

Boy

ACTOR 2 Mrs. Dilber

Christmas Past

Mrs. Cratchit

Annabel

Businessman

ACTOR 3 Businessman

Fezziwig

Ghost of Christmas Present

Old Joe

ACTOR 4 Bob Cratchit

Jacob Marley

Businessman

ACTOR 5 Fan

Belle

Want

Annabel

ACTOR 6 Fred

Young Scrooge

Peter Cratchit

The stage is empty. ACTOR 1 appears.

ACTOR 1

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. We had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going straight to heaven, we were all going straight to hell. A time when anything was possible and nothing was changed. When some grew rich while others starved. A time of great achievement and great despair. When caution tempered justice and fear made us cruel. When impudence grew loud and wisdom was ignored. A time like no other and a time like now.

Enter SCROOGE.

Marley was dead—

SCROOGE

(interrupts)

—to begin with.

ACTOR 1

(as SCROOGE comes forward)

His burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker. The chief mourner, Ebenezer Scrooge—

SCROOGE

Sole mourner!

ACTOR 1

Sole mourner.

SCROOGE

Sole executor, sole friend, sole administrator, partner, assign and residuary legatee. Shrewd and industrious. And proud to be so. Hard and sharp as flint from which no steel has ever struck a generous fire; secret, self-contained. Solitary as an oyster. External heat and cold mean nothing. Only my money warms me.

He crosses to his office.

ACTOR 1

It's already dark though the city clocks just rung three. Fog pours in at every chink and keyhole, curling under the door, stinking of soot and ash. Scrooge is busy in his counting-house.

Stands aside to watch.

SCROOGE

(at his desk, counting)

Farthings, pennies, ha'pennies, shillings, florins, guineas. Every penny counted. Sending them out in the world to bring back more. Lending when no one else will at interest they don't dare. Business is a fine thing! The rest is humbug!

Enter ACTOR 6—FRED.

ACTOR 6—FRED

Still at work, uncle?

SCROOGE

What do you want?

FRED

It's Christmas Eve!

SCROOGE

Humbug!

FRED

Christmas a humbug? You don't mean that.

SCROOGE

What's Christmas to you but a time for paying bills without money; finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer?

FRED

Christmas is a good time, uncle. Best time of the year. When we remember those we love and keep them close. A time to look back and see what we did wrong and how to put it right.

SCROOGE

I'll keep Christmas in my own way.

FRED

But you don't!

SCROOGE

Then let me leave it alone.

FRED

Come dine with us tomorrow! Promise you will.

SCROOGE

If it's money you're after you'll get nothing from me.

FRED

Dear uncle Scrooge, why'd you talk to me this way?

SCROOGE

(angrily)

Why'd you get married? What'd you get married for? Who said you could?

FRED

Why does any man get married?

SCROOGE

Don't come running to me when you've a child on the way and your idle young wife's nothing but a burden.

FRED

(offended but polite)

I'll bid you farewell, uncle.

SCROOGE

As feckless as your father. Useless!

FRED

I won't quarrel with you, uncle. Indeed I won't. You're all the family I have in the world. As I am yours. Can't we try to be friends? For one day at least? If not for my sake then for...

Scrooge turns his back angrily.

As you wish. Sha'n't bother you again. I made this attempt to honor Christmas and the person we both of us...

SCROOGE

Humbug!

FRED

So you say. But I'll keep my Christmas humor and with all my heart...

I'll bid you merry Christmas, uncle Scrooge!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

FRED

And a happy New Year!

SCROOGE

(furious)

Good afternoon!

Exit FRED.

ACTOR 1

In the dank back room, not much more than a cellar, Bob Cratchit...

Enter ACTOR 4—CRATCHIT.

ACTOR 1

... has been trying to keep the chill from crippling his hands by warming them at a candle as a dismal lump of coal smolders in the grate. Consulting his watch, he winds his muffler about his neck.

ACTOR 4 approaches SCROOGE.

ACTOR 4—CRATCHIT

Beggin' your pardon, sir.

SCROOGE

Why aren't you at your desk?

CRATCHIT

Well...

SCROOGE

Well, what?

CRATCHIT

Christmas Eve, sir.

SCROOGE

What of it?

CRATCHIT

I was hoping... The children'll be waiting.

SCROOGE

What's that to me?

CRATCHIT

They don't reckon it's Christmas till we're all together. Don't like to disappoint 'em.

SCROOGE

You don't mind disappointing me.

CRATCHIT

I'm sure I do my best, sir.

SCROOGE

You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

CRATCHIT

Well, yes, sir. If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE

It's not convenient. Not convenient at all.

CRATCHIT

(attempts a smile)

Only one day a year, sir.

SCROOGE

That's no excuse for picking my pocket every twenty-fifth of December! If I stopped you half a crown you'd think yourself ill-used. But you don't think me ill-used when I pay a day's wages for no work.

Enter ACTOR 3—BUSINESSMAN.

ACTOR 3—BUSINESSMAN

(genial)

Scrooge and Marley's, is it? Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge or Mr Marley?

SCROOGE

Marley's dead seven year, sir. Seven year tonight.

BUSINESSMAN

I've no doubt his liberality is well represented by...

SCROOGE

What do you want?

BUSINESSMAN

At this festive season it's appropriate we make some slight provision for the poor. So we are taking up...

SCROOGE

What do you mean 'poor'?

BUSINESSMAN

The poor, sir. Those who have nothing.

SCROOGE

What about them?

BUSINESSMAN

Thousands have no roof over their head. Thousands more want food and clothes.

SCROOGE

(cutting him short)

Are there no prisons?

BUSINESSMAN

Prisons?

SCROOGE

And the workhouses. Still in operation? Nothing happened to stop their useful work?

BUSINESSMAN

I see I've not explained myself. We—fellow brokers, bankers, businessmen, philanthropists, men of good standing on 'change—are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy those less fortunate than ourselves some meat and drink and means of warmth.

SCROOGE

You don't say.

BUSINESSMAN

What shall I put you down for? Whatever amount you might care to give will be most appreciated.

SCROOGE

(scornful)

Nothing!

BUSINESSMAN

You wish to be left anonymous?

SCROOGE

(irritation getting the better of him)

I wish to be left alone! I don't make myself merry at Christmas. Why should I provide luxuries for them too idle to provide their own? No one hands me anything. What I've got I worked for.

(angrily)

I support the establishments I mentioned through taxes I pay. They cost me enough. Let the poor go there—where they belong!

BUSINESSMAN

Many can't go there. And many... many would rather die!

SCROOGE

If they'd rather die they'd better do it and decrease the surplus population. It's not my business!

BUSINESSMAN

With so many in need... !

SCROOGE

Humbug! Relieve your own conscience if you like. I sleep well enough. What you call charity, I call robbery. I won't be robbed. Not this day nor any other. Good day to you, sir.

Exit BUSINESSMAN.

CRATCHIT stands waiting.

CRATCHIT

If you please, sir.

SCROOGE

Still there? Still got your hand out?

CRATCHIT

Sorry, sir, I'm sure, sir...

SCROOGE

Take tomorrow if you must. Be here early the next morning if you want to keep your job. There's plenty would be grateful.

CRATCHIT

Thank you, sir. And if I may say, sir, a Merry Christmas.

SCROOGE

Merry? What have you to be merry about? Fifteen shillings a week and a wife and family hanging round your neck! How many children? Don't tell me. I don't want to know. You can starve for all I care. There's your Merry Christmas!

CRATCHIT

Yes, sir.

SCROOGE

Go on, get out! Get out before I change my mind and keep you here all night!

Exit CRATCHIT.

ACTOR 1

Scrooge left his office, locking the door behind him.

MUSIC: *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen.*

Crowds of people clog streets. Crammed with all manner of good things to eat, brightly-lit shops throw a blaze of light through the fog onto dirty snow. Scrooge passes a brazier burning brightly, a crowd of shadowy figures gathered round it to get warm. A ragged shape approaches, wrapped in meagre rags, its feet bound in sacking, fingers blue from cold, gaunt face crusted in grime, driven mad by the smell of good things to eat coming from shops nearby, a child, a boy, like any one of the thousands who live on the streets fighting rats for food.

Enter ACTOR 6—BEGGAR. He kneels before SCROOGE, holding out one hand.

ACTOR 6—BEGGAR

Please, sir. Can I... ?

SCROOGE

Get away! I know what you're after. Think you can rob me... ?

SCROOGE raises his walking-stick, threatening the boy.

BEGGAR

Sir, no, sir! Don't mean no harm... Please, sir.

SCROOGE

I'll have the law on you!

Exit BEGGAR, running.

(calling after him)

I know you! You have nothing so you want what's mine! I'll see you hanged first. You hear me? Hanged!

SCROOGE turns and slowly walks the perimeter of the stage.

ACTOR 1 comes forward.

ACTOR 1

To celebrate his freedom from humanity Scrooge takes a melancholy dinner in a melancholy tavern—boiled fowl and a questionable pie. Since he doesn't have to pay for it, he sits by the fire to read the newspapers, before opening his banker's books to gloat over columns of profit and loss. Satisfied that all is as it should be he takes himself home.

SCROOGE is walking, shivers.

The cold grew more intense. A piercing, searching biting cold.

SCROOGE

They all want something for nothing. All want what's mine. Why's my nephew come upsetting me? Invitations? Let him keep his invitations. He'll get nothing from me. I'll see him damned first!

A sudden sharp pain stabs at his heart. For a moment he is terror-stricken, clutching himself.

What? What's this? Save me! Help me!

Panting, he pulls himself together, turns up his coat collar up about his ears.

Humbug!

ACTOR 1

The dark is so profound, so thick black, that though he knows every stone, he must grope his way across the courtyard to his door.

Exit ACTOR 1.

SCROOGE goes to put his key in the lock. ACTOR 4—MARLEY'S face is lit. Instead of the door-knocker under his hand SCROOGE sees the face.

SCROOGE

Marley! That you? Jacob... Marley?

He raises his hand as if to touch MARLEY'S face finding instead the door-knocker.

He rubs at his heart as if to ease a residue of pain.

Shadows!

Enter ACTOR 2—MRS DILBER, holding up a greasy candle.

ACTOR 2—MRS DILBER

Oh, sir. Mister Scrooge, sir...

Startled, SCROOGE jumps.

SCROOGE

What is it? What is it you want?

MRS DILBER

Was just waiting to see you home, sir... your gruel's ready on the hob. And I put a lump of coal in the grate. Just the one, sir. The way you like it.

SCROOGE

All right. Get out, go on.

MRS DILBER
(dawdling)

Yes, sir...

SCROOGE
Now what? What do you want?

MRS DILBER
It is Christmas, sir. Christmas Eve, and all, sir...

SCROOGE
And you've got your hand out like the rest of them.

MRS DILBER
I don't know what you mean, sir. But if I could have me wages, sir...

SCROOGE
So you can fill yourself with gin, I suppose.

MRS DILBER
(with dignity)
Christmas cheer, sir...

SCROOGE
(peering at her)
God, you're ugly! Here.
(sorting coins in his palm)
You won't be in tomorrow, I take it.

MRS DILBER
If that's all right, sir...

SCROOGE
Don't spare a thought for me.

MRS DILBER
Only my sister's coming from Chiswick.

SCROOGE
Damn you and damn your sister.

MRS DILBER
(taking the coins)
Thank you, sir. And merry Christ...

SCROOGE

Get out before I kick you out!

MRS DILBER hurries out. He looks around the gloomy, dark room. The solitary candle gutters near the paltry fire.

Don't care if it's dark. Darkness is cheap. I like it dark!

Bangs and rumblings come from below.

Who's there? Who's that?

The bangs and rumblings grow louder, as coming up from below ground, up the stairs toward him.

He looks around, behind a screen, under his chair. Refusing to be frightened, he pulls off his frock-coat, putting it carefully aside, and puts on a long dressing-gown, goes to the fire where a small pot hisses on the grate.

The noises continue, growing louder still. As he tries to raise the pot he sees his hand is shaking.

Humbug! Nothing to fear. Nothing's here. Don't be a fool!

As he sits in the chair a tolling bell sounds from above. The room is bathed in a faint, flickering light. Bangs and rumblings come from below, mingled with the sound of children laughing.

Who's that? Who are you? Playing tricks?

From below a door slams shut: massive, somber. And then a sound without a name, incomprehensible.

Let you show yourself. I dare you!

ACTOR 4—MARLEY faces SCROOGE, who screams. A kerchief under MARLEY's chin is knotted on top of his head holding his jaw in place.

Marley!

ACTOR 4—MARLEY

As I was. And have been. Watching you many a night you couldn't see me.

SCROOGE

What's that chain that's wrapped about you? Wound about you like a tail, Jacob? All your keys and ledgers, cash-boxes and ledgers weighing you down? What do you want with me?

MARLEY

Much! In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE

What are you now?

MARLEY

A messenger from the invisible world come to do you good.

SCROOGE

Humbug!

MARLEY

You don't believe me?

SCROOGE

I don't.

MARLEY

Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE

Because little things affect 'em. A slight disorder of the stomach makes 'em cheats. An undigested bit of beef. That pie I had for supper.

MARLEY

(shrieks at SCROOGE, long and loud)

Ahhh!!

His kerchief slips, letting his jaw fall open, his teeth yellow and blackened. Appalled, Scrooge falls out of his chair onto his knees.

SCROOGE

No, no...! For God's sake...! Cover your...!

MARLEY

(harsh)

Do you believe in me or not?

SCROOGE

I do, I do!

MARLEY

You must! For your own sake you must. You must believe.

SCROOGE

Why are you here?

MARLEY

It is required of every man that the spirit within him walks abroad among his fellow-men, and travels far and wide. If that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death.

SCROOGE

Why are you fettered, Jacob? Why?

MARLEY

This chain I wear I forged in life—link by link, yard by yard; wrapped it round me of my own free will. Would you know the weight and length of your chain? I've seen it, Ebenezer. As heavy and as long as mine and that was seven year ago. You've labored mightily on it since! A monstrous weight for any man to bear.

SCROOGE

(muttering, refusing to listen)

Humbug!... bah!...

MARLEY

(fierce)

If you won't hear the truth from me you'll hear it from others less forgiving!

SCROOGE

(piteously)

Mercy! Jacob... Speak comfort to me.

MARLEY

There is no comfort. Not for me. And not for you. Unless you listen. There is no time! Can't stay. Can't linger. Not here. Not anywhere. Seven years dead. No rest, no peace. Only the torture of remorse that never ends. What I wouldn't do when I lived I cannot do now I'm dead.

SCROOGE

But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.

MARLEY

Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, those were my business. Hear me! You will be haunted by three Spirits.

SCROOGE

Spirits? What spirits is that?

MARLEY

Expect the first when the bell tolls twelve. For this once the invisible world reveals itself to you. What's all around you every day but you're too blind to see.

MARLEY retreats, beckoning. Behind him, the window raises itself a little for each step he takes. So that when he reaches it, it is wide open. The air is filled with phantoms.

SCROOGE

These spectres... Who are they? Why do they cry out so? They wear chains like yours, Jacob.

MARLEY

These are they who closed their eyes to the suffering about them.

SCROOGE

Look! That's Bellamy! Must be dead these twenty years. And Finley! Why's he weep so, Jacob? He was a big man on 'change. I never knew him as a man of feeling.

MARLEY

See that safe of iron he drags behind? The young woman freezing there?
A starving infant at her breast? He'd help her if he could but now he
can't. He had the chance and now he's lost the power. This is his tor-
ment. And mine. There was no warning sent to me. None cared enough
to save me.

SCROOGE

Save me? Who wants to save me?

MARLEY

I cannot tell. That must come from other ministers. At other times.

SCROOGE

Wait! Jacob! Stay! Who wants to save me?

MARLEY

Remember what has passed between us! Remember. Though you never
did before remember now! And listen. You must listen!

MARLEY retreats.

SCROOGE

I can do nothing... Why should I...? She's not my problem! Jacob! You
hear me? Let her care for her own child. It's not my problem!

As he sits in his chair, a clock chimes nearby. Other
clocks begin to chime both inside and outside his
room.

Twelve? Can't be! Twelve?! Must be wrong. Did I sleep?

SCROOGE crosses away from the chair.

Was it a dream? What was it he said? A visitation when the clock strikes
twelve. A warning. Warning?

The clocks finish chiming twelve.

The hour itself...

(listening)

... and nothing else! Bah! Humbug!

Enter ACTOR 2—CHRISTMAS PAST, caught in a bright shifting light.

ACTOR 2—CHRISTMAS PAST
I am the Ghost of Christmas Past!

SCROOGE
Past, indeed. You're passing strange. Well, I'm not afraid.

CHRISTMAS PAST
Why should you be?

SCROOGE
You're like a child. Except you're not. A queer kind of spirit—if that's what you are. Christmas Past? Long past?

CHRISTMAS PAST
Your past.

SCROOGE
What brings you here to trouble me?

CHRISTMAS PAST
Your reclamation. Rise! and come with me!

CHRISTMAS PAST offers a hand.

SCROOGE
I'd rather not...

CHRISTMAS PAST
Take my hand!

SCROOGE
No!

CHRISTMAS PAST
Don't be afraid.

SCROOGE
Who said I'm afraid?

CHRISTMAS PAST
Little man...!

Reluctantly, SCROOGE takes the spirit's hand.
CHRISTMAS PAST leads him beyond the confines
of his room. Lights change.

SCROOGE
(shielding his face)

We walk through walls! Fly above the city!

(looking out)

Where are we!

CHRISTMAS PAST

Where do you think?

SCROOGE

The light's too bright to bear!

CHRISTMAS PAST

Yet bear it you must.

SCROOGE

I know this place! I was a boy here! This road...! I know each gate, each
post and tree. The town yonder... look!

(points)

All of it. I know it all. As if I'd never left.

CHRISTMAS PAST

Your lip is trembling. And what's that upon your cheek? Strange to
know a place so well and have forgot it.

SCROOGE

I know those boys! Look! Riding their ponies. We were at school to-
gether. Why don't they see us?

CHRISTMAS PAST

They are shadows of things that have been. They have no consciousness
of us. Remember this place?

SCROOGE

Where I was at school. Why's it deserted?

CHRISTMAS PAST

Not quite deserted. Look.

ACTOR 6—YOUNG SCROOGE enters.

A solitary child, abandoned by his friends, is left there still. At Christmas.

SCROOGE

Me! As I was! Alone again. And hungry. Always hungry. And cold. Never had clothes enough to warm me.

CHRISTMAS PAST

Lost in his own imagination...!

SCROOGE

A book I'd found. An old thing. *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Magic carpets! Happy endings. A world of dreams-come-true. Poor boy...!

Overcome, SCROOGE turns away.

I wish...

CHRISTMAS PAST

What do you wish?

SCROOGE

Too late now.

CHRISTMAS PAST

Tell me.

SCROOGE

Nothing. A boy... begging... I wish I'd... given... that's all. Stupid!

CHRISTMAS PAST moves, indicates another place.

CHRISTMAS PAST

Another Christmas! In another time.

Enter ACTOR 5—FAN.

SCROOGE

Fan!

ACTOR 5—FAN

Ebenezer!

SCROOGE

(to CHRISTMAS PAST)

Her dear, remembered voice! The happiness once more to see her! To hold her once more. Fan!

He reaches out his arms.

CHRISTMAS PAST

She can't see you. You can't hold her. These are only specters of what was.

FAN

Christmas.

ACTOR 1—YOUNG SCROOGE

Worst time!

FAN

Best! You'll see. I've come to take you from this place!

YOUNG SCROOGE

Father will never...

FAN

Father has changed.

YOUNG SCROOGE

How has he changed? In what way?

FAN

I said I must bring you home and he said yes!

YOUNG SCROOGE

Too late.

FAN

No!

YOUNG SCROOGE

He hates me. I don't know why.

FAN

No, Ebenezer! He's changed.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Enough to love me?

FAN

If you could see how he suffers.

YOUNG SCROOGE

He blames me.

FAN
He blames himself.

YOUNG SCROOGE
Yet he punishes me.

FAN
If mother had lived... !

YOUNG SCROOGE
I should never've been born... !

FAN
Hush, Ebenezer. You're to come home and never come back. You're to be apprenticed and be a man! And we're to never be apart again.

YOUNG SCROOGE turns his face from her, weeping.

Come! Take my hand.

FAN holds out her hand to him. YOUNG SCROOGE shakes his head,

Be brave. All will be well! You'll see.

YOUNG SCROOGE takes her hand.

Father's ashamed. You must forgive him and overlook what can't be changed. There's no one suffers more than he.

She kisses his cheek.

Soon, Ebenezer. Soon!

Exit FAN. SCROOGE watches her go.

CHRISTMAS PAST
She had, I think, children.

SCROOGE
(fierce)
One child!

CHRISTMAS PAST
Your nephew.

SCROOGE

She died giving him life.

CHRISTMAS PAST

As your mother died giving you life.

Exit YOUNG SCROOGE.

SCROOGE walks forward. CHRISTMAS PAST follows.

SCROOGE

Now what? Where are we now? A city? But not a big place. And it's Christmastime. The shops all lit up. What's this place, spirit? I think I know it! Oh, this dear old place! Here it is again, though I know it's gone. Old Fezziwig's!

ACTOR 4—FEZZIWIG enters.

ACTOR 4—FEZZIWIG

Yo there! Ebenezer!

SCROOGE

I was apprenticed here!

FEZZIWIG

Ebenezer! Dick!

SCROOGE

Alive again! Hale and hearty. All of us together! Me and Dick Wilkins—he was my friend, my first my only true... I lost him somehow... over the years... But how we did love old Fezziwig!

FEZZIWIG

Yo ho, my boys! No more work. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer!

Enter ACTOR 6—YOUNG SCROOGE.

Clear away, my lads, and make room! Put up the shutters. Sweep the floor. Hurry, boys! Heap the fire. Make all snug and warm. Make yourselves smart. Bring in the fiddler! Let him tune like fifty stomach-aches!

MUSIC: *Sir Roger de Coverley*.

SCROOGE moves to centre, lost in the enchantment of the past.

SCROOGE

There's Mrs. Fezziwig! Just as she was. A mother to us all. And the three Miss Fezziwigs, with their suitors. All of us! So happy then! Look! There's the housemaid with her cousin. And the cook with her brother's most particular friend, the milkman. And the boy from over the way who was starved by his master. See how Mrs. Fezziwig piles his plate with food! And the girl from next door but one whose mistress beat her. Given refuge and a place of warmth. Here they all are! Such fun we had! Such good things to eat. And such dances! Such dances as you never saw! Old Fezziwig with his missus! None could compare! Top couple they were. The *Sir Roger de Coverley*—that's when they knew how to dance!—advance retire: hold hands and curtsy; corkscrew, thread-the-needle, back again! Like none of us would ever die or grow old! None would live with heartache and regret. None would rather forget than remember.

(sorrowfully)

After the dancing Fezziwig thanked us... he'd had a few drops in by then and was laughing... the way he did. That good old man.

Exit FEZZIWIG.

He had a way of... enjoying life. Never did things by half measure. Had a present for all of us, to show his appreciation for the year past and encouragement for the year to come. When it was adone, the warehouse swept, every last scrap of food eaten, Dick and I would lie in our beds under the counter in the shop till the fire burned itself out praising good old Fezziwig till we fell asleep.

CHRISTMAS PAST

Small matter to make you so full of gratitude.

SCROOGE

Small!

CHRISTMAS PAST

He spent but a few pounds, three or four perhaps. Was that so much?

SCROOGE

That's not it. You don't understand! He was the master. He had the power to make us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. What's it matter if his power was only in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant you can't count in your hand or reckon in a ledger. The happiness he gave was quite as great as if it cost a fortune.

He covers his face, turns away. CHRISTMAS PAST moves closer to him.

CHRISTMAS PAST

What is it?

SCROOGE

Don't look at me. Nothing at all. Nothing!

CHRISTMAS PAST

Nothing?

SCROOGE

(angrily)

All right, if you must know I thought of my clerk.

CHRISTMAS PAST

And?

SCROOGE

That's all. No lesson here. Cheap nostalgia! A magic lantern show.

CHRISTMAS PAST

My time grows short.

SCROOGE

Humbug!

CHRISTMAS PAST

Another Christmas. Another year.

CHRISTMAS PAST takes SCROOGE'S hand, leads him upstage.

Enter ACTOR 5—BELLE, followed by ACTOR 6—
YOUNG SCROOGE.

SCROOGE
(seeing her)

Belle! Belle.

ACTOR 5—BELLE
I don't like this, Ebenezer. All this talk. How much you have, how much
you will have. How you cheat this one...

YOUNG SCROOGE
(eagerly)
Not cheat. Never cheat. If I give capital to those who otherwise can't get
it I can ask any rate of return I please. Risk means return which begets
more capital I can lend at higher rates. We all have reason to be happy.

BELLE moves away from him.

What is it? Belle?

BELLE
Always some way to get the better of others. To profit from others.

YOUNG SCROOGE
That's very nice, I must say!

BELLE
Look at you. Short-tempered, hard...

YOUNG SCROOGE
Industrious.

BELLE
Conniving.

YOUNG SCROOGE
I see.

BELLE
You're offended. Shouldn't I tell you what I see?

She waits for him to speak.

YOUNG SCROOGE
The world condemns poverty, yet you condemn me when I fight it.

BELLE

I don't condemn hard work, Ebenezer! But these schemes... these speculations... they leave no room in your heart for any other consideration. You've abandoned all your nobler aspirations.

YOUNG SCROOGE

What can be nobler than an independent man? Making his own way in the world?

BELLE

At the expense of all who walk in your door? Who trust you? Who believe you?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Leave business to me.

BELLE

If I'm to live off your business it's my business, too. Since Mr. Marley took you into his firm... made you his partner... you're changed.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I'm not changed toward you, am I?

BELLE

When you proposed and I accepted we both were poor. We said we'd wait to marry till we could better ourselves through honest endeavor.

YOUNG SCROOGE

You think it's easy to make money? You think it's lying in the gutter waiting to be found? You think it doesn't require a constant dedication? Watchfulness when others lie asleep? Money needs courting.

BELLE

You've bettered yourself and I'm still waiting.

YOUNG SCROOGE says nothing.

If you were free to choose again would you choose me? A girl with nothing?

SCROOGE
(to CHRISTMAS PAST)

Stop this.

BELLE

You could do so much better. Isn't that right?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Have I ever sought release?

BELLE

Not in words.

YOUNG SCROOGE

In what then?

BELLE

In everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If I hold you to your contract you will come to hate me. If you don't already. Here is your ring. Goodbye, Ebenezer. You're free of me.

She turns as if to go.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Belle!

She stops. Turns back to him.

BELLE

Yes? What is it, Ebenezer? What would you tell me?

Abashed, he struggles to frame the words that would stop her but fails and instead becomes enraged.

YOUNG SCROOGE

(harshly)

Alright then, go! Be on your way. Since you can abandon me so easily I will abandon you!

BELLE

Your pride is hurt. You'll forget me soon enough. And if the memory of what's past should give you pain I know it will be brief. You'll dismiss the recollection as an unprofitable dream from which it happened well that you awoke.

(kisses his cheek)

May you be happy in the life you've chosen! Think of me sometimes.

Exit BELLE. Exit YOUNG SCROOGE.

SCROOGE

(desperate)

Conduct me home! Show me no more!

CHRISTMAS PAST

These shadows are what you made them. The past is set. A chain forged link by link..

SCROOGE

Take me from here! Haunt me no longer!

Exit CHRISTMAS PAST.

Weeping, SCROOGE falls into the chair, covers his eyes, unaware of when the Spirit leaves him.

A clock is striking. He sits up in terror.

(looking around)

What is this? What's the time? Is this tomorrow?

(counting)

... ten, eleven...

SCROOGE hides his face.

Enter ACTOR 3—CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

ACTOR 3—CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Come here where you can know me!

SCROOGE

(forcing himself to look)

Spirit, who are you?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I am the Ghost of Christmas Present! Come you before me.

Reluctantly, SCROOGE approaches. CHRISTMAS PRESENT laughs at him.

My breast is bare

My beard is white

About my head is holly.

I bring a horn stuffed full of gifts

So Christmastime is jolly!

He laughs.

Good things to eat! Tonight I scatter them to all we meet to sweeten their holiday feast!

SCROOGE

To anyone?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Anyone who needs it.

SCROOGE

You mean the poor?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

The poor need it most.

SCROOGE

(covetous)

And your gold? Spilling over your bag. So much of it!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

What of it?

SCROOGE

Surely you won't leave it behind? If you need help... ? Your hands are full.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Bring it if you want. Bring all you want.

SCROOGE looks around, filling his pockets, stuffing them so full they weigh him down.

Take more! Take it all. Help yourself.

SCROOGE

Lovely! Lovely!

SCROOGE tries to stand.

Can't hardly stand.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Take hold of my robe.

SCROOGE

No!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Take hold!

SCROOGE

No, look... I went forth last night. I saw much and learned much. Much indeed. The lesson's sinking in. I can feel it. Truly, Spirit. It's working on me now. I'm not the man I was.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

(amused)

You think in that way to escape?

SCROOGE

Give me time! A day or two.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Little man, you have no time—

SCROOGE

Have mercy, Spirit!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

(offering the hem of his robe)

Take hold. I'll bear the weight.

SCROOGE grasps his robe. They are bathed in a bright light.

SCROOGE

Where are we? Where is this? What's everyone doing about in the streets? Why's everyone so cheerful?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Watch!

Enter ACTOR 2—MRS. CRATCHIT.

ACTOR 2— MRS. CRATCHIT

What has ever got your father and your brother Tim, children?

SCROOGE

What place is this? It's mean enough.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You never saw your clerk's home before? Nor his wife? Nor any of his children.

He turns to MRS. CRATCHIT. Enter ACTOR 4—
CRATCHIT, followed by ACTOR 1—TINY TIM.

ACTOR 4—CRATCHIT
Here we are, my dear. Tim's with me.

MRS. CRATCHIT
How did he get on?

CRATCHIT
Good as gold. He gets so strong, my dear. Don't you think?

MRS. CRATCHIT
(not replying)
Tim, go along. Find Peter.

Exit TINY TIM. CRATCHIT watches him go.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
That's Tim, his youngest boy, and most dearly loved. His daughters, Be-
linda and Martha. Martha's been kept late by her mistress and has only
just arrived. Peter, who'll be apprenticed out next year, and the younger
Cratchits. How many years has Cratchit worked for you and yet you
never knew?

Enter ACTOR 5 and 6—CRATCHIT CHILDREN.

SCROOGE
(mumbles)

...

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Peter's just back with the goose from the baker's where it's been roast-
ing.

MRS. CRATCHIT
It's not every day we get a goose so fine.

CRATCHIT
I should think not!

SCROOGE
That scrawny thing'll never feed them!

Enter ACTOR 1—TINY TIM.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Plenty for all with some to spare. I'll make the gravy hissing hot. Peter, mash the potatoes. Belinda, sweeten up the apple-sauce. Martha, bring me the plates. Bob, you set Tim beside you in the corner. And you young Cratchits stop your noise and set the chairs. If you're hungry cram a spoon in your mouth till the goose is carved.

They sit as if to eat. Mrs Cratchit passes the plates, making sure the children all have enough to eat, quietly sparing her own.

CRATCHIT

Here, my dear, you've given me too much. Take some of mine.

MRS. CRATCHIT

I'll never manage what I've got. It's all too much. Eat up while it's hot.

SCROOGE

Didn't take long to put that away. Hardly a goose at all. More like a roasted cat.

CRATCHIT

My dear, there never was such a goose! Never, ever has such a goose been cooked before.

MRS. CRATCHIT

So tender and yet so flavorful. So big and yet so cheap!

CRATCHIT

And still we've got the pudding!

MRS. CRATCHIT

What if it's not done enough? What if it's been stole out the copper while it's been boiling? Suppose it breaks when I turn it out?

CRATCHIT

Clear the table and bring it in! Only way to find out.

They admire the pudding.

There, now! Like a cannon-ball, so hard and firm. Might be your best ever, my dear.

MRS. CRATCHIT

There's near a half of half-a-quarter of brandy on it. Strike a match!

SCROOGE

Miserable looking thing.

They admire the pudding as it flames.

CRATCHIT

A Merry Christmas, my dears.

TINY TIM

God bless us every one!

SCROOGE

Why's he so merry? Man's a fool. Look at him! What's he got to be merry about?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Shh!

SCROOGE

They can't hear us. You said yourself.

CRATCHIT

Now dinner's done let's all take a glass of punch and gather round the fire. Here's luxury for you! Better than Ali Baba's treasure. Better than the measure of Prester John's foot! All of us together! A roof over our heads and food on the table. There's fortune indeed. My dears, let's spare a thought for those not so blessed as we are. For those who'll spend the day alone. Let's drink a toast. I give you Mr. Scrooge.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Robert!

CRATCHIT

The Founder of the Feast!

MRS. CRATCHIT

Founder of the Feast indeed!

SCROOGE

(to CRATCHIT)

That's very good of you.

MRS. CRATCHIT

(losing her temper)

I'll give him Founder of the Feast. I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it.

CRATCHIT

(under his breath to her)

My dear, the children! Christmas Day.

MRS. CRATCHIT

It should be Christmas Day, I'm sure, on which we drink the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you!

CRATCHIT regards her quietly.

I'll drink his health for your sake and the day's but not for his. Long life to him. A merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

(mutters)

He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!

MRS. CRATCHIT remains annoyed.

TINY TIM

I expect God made Mr. Scrooge the way he is just as He made me the way I am and who are we to argue with providence?

Exit ACTORS, leaving SCROOGE and CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

SCROOGE

What's the matter with the boy? Why's he so shriveled? What's withered his leg? Why does Cratchit keep him so close? Is he afraid he'll lose the child? Why does his wife not say what she thinks? Tell me, Spirit, will he live?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Why should you care? If he be like to die, he'd better do it and decrease the surplus population.

SCROOGE

I never meant... !

(startled)

You're half the size you were!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Because my time's half over. Come! There's much to see and not much time.

SCROOGE approaches him fearfully.

Poor sad little soul! Stooped and pinched, old before your time from all your meanness. Grab hold of me. Hold tight!

The lights change.

SCROOGE

Where are we going?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Out into the great wide waiting world!

MUSIC.

SCROOGE

(grabs CHRISTMAS PRESENT's coat-tail)

There's a great rushing wind. Lifting us up!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Hold on tight and you've nothing to fear.

SCROOGE

We're over the clouds. The city's gone. Nothing but black emptiness.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Look down below. What do you see?

SCROOGE

A moor. A desert. Full of stones like giants' headstones.

SCROOGE and CHRISTMAS PRESENT come forward.

What place is this? A hut? Half underground?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

A place where miners live, who labour all year in the bowels of the earth never seeing daylight. But even they know me this night. Look! All dressed up and gathered round a roaring fire!

SCROOGE

They seem cheerful enough.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Because they have each other. Four generations gathered. Leave 'em some of that gold.

SCROOGE

Why should I? It's mine.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You'll get more from giving.

SCROOGE

I'll get more from keeping.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You can't keep it once you wake. I only let you borrow it the while.

SCROOGE

So you admit it! Spirits and their lessons, you admit it's all a dream! I'll wake in the morning and everything'll be as it was.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Is that what you want? For everything to be as it was?

SCROOGE

(uncertain)

I'll leave a little. Since you insist.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Whatever you leave adds savor to their day. If it's freely given.

SCROOGE

I don't know them. They're nothing to me.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

All the more reason to give. Every act of kindness adds to my store, promises my return next year.

SCROOGE thinks, conflicted.

SCROOGE
If it's not real, what does it matter?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Take hold and I'll show you.

SCROOGE holds on to the spirit's trousers.

SCROOGE
So high above the ocean! Don't let me go! I'll fall!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Hold on for your life. I won't stop my transit for you.

SCROOGE
Where do you take me?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT points.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
A lighthouse! See? That jagged rock, remote, two men, keepers of the light, have made a fire in honor of the day and prepared a feast. Even in this lonely place they honor me. And I them. And bless their celebration.

SCROOGE
What've they got to celebrate?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
You're slow of learning, little man.

SCROOGE
I could leave them just a little. A token. Not because it's Christmas. Because we all have a duty...

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Afraid I'll take your treasure?

SCROOGE
(struggling)
It's not heavy.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
You can hardly stand up.

SCROOGE

I can manage.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Not without me you can't. Take hold of my robe.

SCROOGE

The way you fly about! What ship is that down there below us?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Years out from port with years to go before they see their homes. Every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, has a kinder word for his fellows on this day than on any other and shares in its festivities; and has remembered those he cares for at a distance, and has known that they delighted to remember him and all of them together.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT leads SCROOGE on a circuit of the stage.

I stand beside sick beds—and they're cheerful. On foreign lands—they're close at home. Beside struggling men—they're patient in their greater hope. Beside poverty—it's rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge tonight I'll leave my blessing.

Laughter. Enter ACTOR 5—ANNABEL and ACTOR 6—FRED.

SCROOGE

Who's laughing? Who's that laughing. Spirit? Spirit, where are you?!

ACTOR 6—FRED

He said Christmas was a humbug! And believed it too!

ACTOR 5—ANNABEL

More shame for him, Fred!

FRED

He's a comical old fellow and that's the truth—and not so pleasant as he might be! However, his offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.

ANNABEL

Well, I've no patience with him.

FRED

I have. I can't help it. I couldn't be angry with him if I tried.

ANNABEL

After all his unkindness?

FRED

Who suffers most? He does. He takes it into his head to dislike us—won't come to dine—and what's the consequence? He spends the day alone.

He kisses ANNABEL'S hand.

For my mother's sake if not for his, I say a Merry Christmas, uncle Scrooge. And a Happy New Year to you, wherever you are. You wouldn't take it in person but you can't deny me now so I will have my own way in the end.

(to her)

Think, my dear, if you were he... sent away as a boy. All his father's grief turned to rage against him. Abandoned to a school my mother said was worse than any prison. His happiness ruined again when old Fezziwig died as his apprenticeship ended and he was about to enter the firm. What other lesson was he to learn?

ANNABEL

(thoughtful)

As you say—to uncle Scrooge.

FRED

And to you. My dearest love. You mustn't tire yourself.

ANNABEL

Don't fuss me.

FRED

You must let me fuss just a little.

FRED kisses ANNABEL'S hand.

This time next year! What a Christmas that will be!

SCROOGE

(to FRED, moved)

Dear boy... !

SCROOGE turns away. FRED leads ANNABEL
away.

If I might say to him...

(pulls himself together)

Humbug. It's all humbug! A dream! Nothing!!

SCROOGE turns back to CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

You're shrinking. And your hair's gone grey.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Upon this globe my life is very brief. It ends with the night. As it began.

SCROOGE

One night! That's nothing.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It's enough. So long as it's well used.

Clocks are chiming.

My time draws near.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT moves away from
SCROOGE. As he moves, ACTOR 1—IGNORANCE
and ACTOR 5—WANT are seen huddled together,
hiding in his robe.

SCROOGE

Spirit... something there. Peeping round behind you... something...!

Hiding in your robes. Children! Are they?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Two children, a boy and girl. They've been here all along. You only
couldn't see them. Now you do. Perhaps you're learning.

SCROOGE

They're filthy. Skin and bone.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Unwanted. Cast aside. The grace of youth should be upon them. Instead,
a stale and shriveled hand, has pinched them, pulled them into shreds.

Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurk, and glare out menacing.

Growing increasingly loud, a great heavy bell is tolling.

SCROOGE

Are they yours?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

They are Man's.

(presenting the children, shadowy figures)

The boy is Ignorance. The girl is Want. Beware them. Beware them both. But most of all beware the boy, for on his brow I see that written which will doom us all, unless the writing be erased.

SCROOGE

Have they no refuge or resource?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?

He is retreating.

Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses...?

On the bell's last stroke, SCROOGE gasps, hiding his face from what he fears is coming.

Exit ACTORS.

The stage darkens. In the darkness, a spectral figure appears, as menacing as it is insubstantial. Gathering all his courage, SCROOGE looks at CHRISTMAS FUTURE.

SCROOGE

Am I in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come? I fear you more than any specter I have seen. I must believe your purpose is to do me good. So I will follow.

He steps forward.

Lead on, Spirit!

Enter ACTORS 2, 3, and 4—BUSINESSMEN, coming forward to form a group.

ACTOR 4—BUSINESSMAN 1
Old Scratch got his.

ACTOR 3—BUSINESSMAN 2
Not before time. Cold, ain't it?

ACTOR 2—BUSINESSMAN 3
When did he die?

BUSINESSMAN 2
Last night. Just in time for Christmas.

BUSINESSMAN 1
That should brighten the season.

They all laugh.

SCROOGE
(to CHRISTMAS FUTURE)
What's he mean?

(to BUSINESSMAN 2)
Who's dead?

BUSINESSMAN 3
What's he done with his money?

BUSINESSMAN 2
Ain't left it to me. That's all I know.

SCROOGE
Who's dead!

BUSINESSMAN 1
Likely to be a cheap funeral. Don't know anyone who'll go to it.

BUSINESSMAN 2
Who'll get his office?

BUSINESSMAN 3
Who'll get his business.

The group breaks apart.

SCROOGE
Who's dead? Spirit. Won't you tell me?

SCROOGE follows the Spirit as it leads him on.

I was never here before. Down these streets? Foul and reeking. Is this the way? A shop? I think it's a shop. Though what it sells I can't imagine. Spirit? Answer me. Won't you answer? Tell me why I'm here?

Enter ACTOR 3—OLD JOE.

ACTOR 3—OLD JOE

Who's that now? Speak up! Who's that coming to see me?

Enter ACTOR 2—MRS. DILBER, carrying a large bundle.

ACTOR 2—MRS. DILBER

Just me, Joe! Only me.

OLD JOE

What you brought me then, my cuckoo, my darling? What you got to show me?

SCROOGE

That's the woman cleans for me. What's she doing here? In a place like this? What's she got? I don't understand.

MRS. DILBER

Nothing he won't be needing no more. Nothing but what's my right after all these years of putting up with his spite.

SCROOGE

Who does she mean? Who else did she clean for? Who is dead?

OLD JOE

If he'd been a bit more generous in his life he might've had someone look after him in his death instead of gasping out his last breath alone. What you got to show?

MRS. DILBER

Pair of sleeve-buttons. Sheets and towels.

OLD JOE

Didn't die of nothing catching, did he?

MRS. DILBER

Two silver teaspoons. Pair of sugar tongs...

Right dainty! OLD JOE

Boots. MRS. DILBER

Boots is nice! OLD JOE

And this 'ere bundle. MRS. DILBER

OLD JOE kneels, struggling with the bundle.

Rich stuff, this. Rich and heavy. OLD JOE

Should be ashamed! Robbing decent people. She'll hear from me, make no mistake. SCROOGE

Curtains, is it? OLD JOE

Bed curtains. MRS. DILBER

Don't tell me you took 'em down with him lyin' there! OLD JOE

Rings and all. And you may look through that night-shirt till your eyes ache—you won't find a hole in it. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They laid him out in it but I took it off. Waste of good linen. Put him in calico. Warm enough for where 'e's gone. MRS. DILBER

This is how he meets his end. In life 'e frightened every one away so there's no one to interfere with us makin' a profit off him now he's dead! OLD JOE
(laughing)

Truer word was never spoke! MRS. DILBER

Exit MRS. DILBER and OLD JOE together.

SCROOGE

The case of this unhappy man might be my own. I see it now. My life tends that way. It could almost be me. Spirit, tell me who's dead. So dark where you've brought me. So dark... so cold. What is this place?

(cries out)

Merciful heaven! A bed...! Is it? A ragged sheet I feel. And something covered. Some person? Lying here? Unwatched, unwept, uncared for—the body of a man! The man they robbed? Who died alone and friendless? If I could raise him up what would his thoughts be? Avarice, hard-dealing, griping cares? They brought him to a rich end, truly!

SCROOGE looks toward CHRISTMAS FUTURE.

Spirit! this is a fearful place. Leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson. I swear upon... I am changed. I feel it. I have learned. Let us go!

CHRISTMAS FUTURE seems to move, a spectral hand extends, a finger points.

MUSIC: O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL.

I can't! Don't ask me! I've not the strength... to uncover him, to look upon his face. I have not the strength, Spirit. I have not the strength! If there's any person who feels some pity caused by this man's death, show that person to me. Spirit, I beg you! Give me some hope. Let him not end like this. Show me one person sorry to see him go. This poor man! He was a child once, like the rest of us. Show me one person who mourns him. One person regrets his end. There must be one!

Enter ACTOR 6—PETER CRATCHIT.

ACTOR 6—PETER CRATCHIT
(reading)

... And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them...

ACTOR 2—MRS. CRATCHIT enters. Hearing PETER, she turns away.

SCROOGE

That's Cratchit's wife. What are we doing here? Why is she crying?

MRS. CRATCHIT
(doing her best not to cry)

I've been sewing too long. The color hurts my eyes. Makes them weak by candle-light.

Hastily, she dries her eyes.

Wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home. Must be near his time.

PETER CRATCHIT
Past it, rather. He's been walking slower since...

He doesn't finish.

MRS. CRATCHIT
I've known him walk with... I've known him walk with Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed. But then, he was so light to carry. And your father loved him. So it was no trouble—no trouble!

Enter ACTOR 4—BOB CRATCHIT.

ACTOR 4—CRATCHIT
Here you are, my dears! Haven't you done well with all your work! How quick you've all got on.

MRS. CRATCHIT
I want things nice for him.

CRATCHIT
That's right. A pillow for his head! And you've almost finished his quilt.

MRS. CRATCHIT
Still a lot to do by Sunday.

CRATCHIT
You'll be ready long before, I shouldn't be surprised.

MRS. CRATCHIT
Were you up there today, Bob?

He takes her hand, holds it to his cheek.

CRATCHIT
I wish you'd come. It'd do you good. It's still quite green. Even this late in the year. They've made all ready. There's a special place for children.

We'll go of a Sunday to sit with him. In spring they say it's very... Oh my dear! My little, little child! My Tim!

He weeps, helpless.

SCROOGE

What's happened to the boy?

(turning to find the SPIRIT)

Spirit, tell me! What's happened?

MRS. CRATCHIT

(under her breath)

The children, Robert! You'll frighten them. We must be strong for his sake.

CRATCHIT

Yes. Yes, my dear, of course. The children.

MRS. CRATCHIT

We lost him too soon but we were lucky he was ours. Don't you ever forget! We had our happiness longer than most.

CRATCHIT

If we'd had the money to save him. If I could've done better. Got on in the world. A better father for him. If I could be in that coffin and not him.

MRS. CRATCHIT

(fierce)

Don't say that! Don't you dare! What would we do without you, Robert? All of us...! What would we do? You'd have us starve? Me in the work-house and the children... ? They never asked for this. They deserve better. They deserve...

She weeps. He embraces her.

CRATCHIT

(encouraging her, and himself)

You'll never guess who I met up there in Highgate, my love! Mr. Scrooge's nephew. Such a kind, well-spoken gentleman! Seeing me there beside our little grave... he inquired into our troubles and I told him of

our loss... I'm heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit, he says, and heartily sorry for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way. He gave me his card. Not for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way. It really seemed as if he had known our Tim, and felt with us.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Better than his uncle!

CRATCHIT

(soothing her)

No, my dear. No. Poor Mr. Scrooge. Poor man! His nephew promised to be on the lookout for a better situation for our Peter. I shouldn't be at all surprised if he found one, too.

MRS. CRATCHIT

That would be kind since you were left with nothing and no prospects...! After all your service!

CRATCHIT

We'll find a way. You'll see. Poor Mr. Scrooge. He did the best he could. And no one suffered more than him.

MRS. CRATCHIT

You're too good. Indeed you are. You make me quite ashamed.

CRATCHIT

No. No no no...

He embraces her, comforts her.

SCROOGE

The past I can't change. But the present... And the future? Spirit?

BOB CRATCHIT leads MRS. CRATCHIT away.

Tell me. Is this what must be, or only might be? Can this be changed? How we live shapes how we end. But if we change how we live don't we change our end? Spirit! Answer me! What is this? Where are we? A graveyard? Is he buried here? That unhappy man. That's why you

brought me? So I might learn from his example? That's his stone at which you point? Ebenezer Scrooge! I am that man! This is my end?

SCROOGE sinks to his knees. Light narrows down on him.

No, Spirit! Why show me this, if I am past all hope? Tell me I may change these shadows by an altered life! Let me help the boy. So he may live. Let me do that. Why must he suffer? Who else can save him? Let me try. Past, present, future. I will keep them close. Kind Spirit, let me try! None of us can promise: but all can try!

He falls face down as lights shift and a roaring fills the stage. When it stops abruptly, he is face down on the bare floorboards of his bedroom. Dizzy, he pulls himself to his feet.

My bed. My chair. As I left 'em. The curtains. Not torn down, not rings and all. They're here—everything's here—I am here. I am... The shadows of the things that would have been may be dispelled. They will be. I swear they will be!

Church bells ring out, joyous. SCROOGE approaches the window, grasps the curtains, pulls them apart, flooding the room with the crisp bright light of a winter morning.

I'm as light as a feather! Merry as a schoolboy! Giddy as a bridegroom.

(tries to pull himself together)

What time is it? What day is it? I see it's day! I only don't know which!

(he laughs)

I don't know how long I've been lost among the Spirits. Don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. To believe such stuff. Such dreams. Never mind. Dreams or not. I'd rather be a baby. Can it be true? Here's the door where Jacob came in! This is the window... where I saw what shouldn't be seen. Where's the gold? I stuffed my pockets... Was it real? Does it matter? Easier to forget. Call it indigestion. Why should I be different now?

No! No going back! Think who sent the spirits. Someone who loved me.
I was loved once. And will be again!

He pushes open the window, breathing deep.

Hey, you! Boy! Hey you, sir!

Enter ACTOR 1—BOY.

Me, sir? ACTOR 1—BOY

You, sir! What's today? SCROOGE

Today? It's Christmas Day, sir. BOY

Christmas Day? The Spirits did it all in one night! SCROOGE

Spirits? BOY

Well, why not? They can do anything they like! SCROOGE

Daresay. BOY
(dubious)

D'you know the poulterer's in the next street but one? SCROOGE

I should think I do! BOY

That's a pleasant boy. An intelligent boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize goose hanging up there? Not the little one; I mean the big one. The one as big as you? SCROOGE

Hangin' there now. BOY

Go and buy it! SCROOGE

BOY

Oh yeah, with what?

SCROOGE

Well, I'll... I'll give you... Money! That's right! Money! Go and buy it. Bring a shopman back so I can tell him where to deliver. I'll give you a shilling for yourself.

BOY

(amazed)

A shillin'!?

SCROOGE

Come back in five minutes... I'll give you half-a-crown!

BOY runs out. SCROOGE comes forward.

Can I do this? I can try. Or get back in bed and never get out again. Or look at myself and...

(drilling himself)

The more you give the more you have! The more you have the more you give.

(bewildered)

Is that right? Spirits! Past, Present, Future... I thank you. Humbly. I make no promises... but I thank you. Let me get out of here... out of this room... out of myself... out into the great wide waiting... world!

MUSIC:

ACTORS cross the stage as if on a street. ACTOR 3—BUSINESSMAN crosses below, as if to avoid SCROOGE.

(calling out)

Dear Sir! Dear Sir, good day to you!

BUSINESSMAN—ACTOR 3

(prepared for an unpleasant encounter)

Mr. Scrooge, isn't it?

SCROOGE

How do you do?

He offers his hand. Somewhat reluctantly, BUSINESSMAN offers his. SCROOGE takes hold of his hand and shakes it.

I hope you succeeded yesterday. Indeed I do. It was so very kind of you to come and see me. So very kind. Such important work you do. Allow me to say a Merry... a Merry...

He's unable to complete what he would say.

BUSINESSMAN
(suspicious)

Mr Scrooge?

SCROOGE
That's my name. Can't deny it! Though it may not be pleasant to you. Or me. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness—I'm afraid I don't quite know how this is done but... if you would take some... if I could give... money!

BUSINESSMAN
Money?

SCROOGE
Yes, money! An amount, say... in the amount, say... amounting to, say... some sort of amount of... some *large* sort of amount of, say...
Money!

SCROOGE seems to shrivel, to stoop again, his eyes lit by the fires of avarice, till he recollects himself and, making an effort greater than any he has made in his life before, forces his shoulders to square, his spine to straighten, his lips to suggest a rudimentary smile.

BUSINESSMAN
(astonished by his behavior)

My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you quite well?

SCROOGE
Please! Come and see me. Will you do me that honor? I've much to make up for. So many back-payments are due and I'm not sure how it's

done. The giving-away. I only know I want to learn. Will you help me? I must do it right. Come and see me, will you?

BUSINESSMAN

With pleasure!

SCROOGE

I thank you. I do. You're very kind.

Exit BUSINESSMAN. Enter ACTOR 1.

ACTOR 1

Unable to delay any longer what it was most he desired and feared—after so many years' neglect who was to say it should go well?—in the afternoon he turned his steps toward his nephew's house, passing the door a dozen times before he found the courage to climb the steps and knock.

SCROOGE stands, as if outside a door waiting for it to be opened. Enter ACTOR 3—FRED. Stands incredulous looking at SCROOGE.

SCROOGE

It is... I. Me.

FRED makes no reply.

Come today to bid you... my dear boy...

FRED reaches out for him, SCROOGE stiffens and stands back a little, determined to say the words.

A Merry... Merry...

SCROOGE turns away.

I'm a fool... forget... too late... why should you care? I bid you good day!

FRED stops him, offers his hand.

FRED

Take my hand. Come. Be brave! All will be well.

SCROOGE turns to him.

SCROOGE
(astonished)

What's that you say?

NEPHEW

I mean...

SCROOGE
I don't care what you mean. What did you *say*?

NEPHEW

Be brave! All...

SCROOGE

All will be well!

Overwhelmed, SCROOGE reaches blindly for FRED.

Forgive me! Forgive me!

FRED
(embracing him)

Dear uncle Scrooge, there's nothing to forgive.

Enter ACTOR 5—ANNABEL.

ANNABEL

Fred?

FRED
My dear, look who's come to dine.

(to SCROOGE)

You will stay to dine?

SCROOGE

If you'll have me.

FRED

May I present...

(to ANNABEL)

My dear, it's uncle Scrooge.

ANNABEL

Uncle...?

SCROOGE
(bowing humbly)

If you please.

ANNABEL
You're very welcome... For Fred's sake. And for mine.
(she kisses his cheek.)

Uncle Ebenezer.

SCROOGE
How lovely you are. And how very kind. No one's permission. My
nephew knew better than I where happiness lies. I wish you both a Mer-
ry... a Merry...

He steps back, gathers his strength.

Merry... !

He turns from them as if despairing. FRED takes hold
of his shoulder, turns him back, watching him closely.
SCROOGE gathers his strength.

A Merry...

He gives up, exhausted. ANNABEL approaches him.

ANNABEL
Here sit... Fred help me...

She appeals to FRED to help her seat SCROOGE. A
flicker of firelight falls on his face.

By the fire... so you'll be warm.

(to FRED)

Perhaps a glass of port?

SCROOGE
How kind you are... So very kind.

ANNABEL
Rest. Warm yourself.

FRED hands her a glass of port which she offers to
SCROOGE.

SCROOGE

I have been cold. Indeed I have. For such long time.

ANNABEL

Here. Take a sip.

SCROOGE

(toasts her)

A merry Christmas, my dear.

She kisses his cheek. Impulsively, he takes hold of her hand to kiss it.

FRED

My dear uncle Scrooge, you don't know how long I've hoped for this day!

SCROOGE

Oh Fred! My dear boy, I have had such dreams!... truth to tell I can't rightly say what. All I know is when I look at same familiar streets I see them different. I look at myself and glimpse the person I once was. When I was your age and life was before me. I've wasted so much time—who knows how much is left? A year? Perhaps more? I hope more. I can't waste another day. There's something I must do... before anything else. Would you help me? I don't know how.

FRED

Of course.

SCROOGE

It means a trip to Camden Town.

FRED

Then let's be on our way!

Exit ANNABEL.

SCROOGE circles the stage ending center, FRED beside him.

SCROOGE

(roaring)

Cratchit! Open this door! Cratchit, do you hear me! Open it now!

Enter ACTOR 4—BOB CRATCHIT, approaching him apprehensively.

(to himself)

What are you doing? What are you saying?

(to CRATCHIT, the force of habit taking over)

There you are! What's... ? Meaning...?

(to someone unseen)

Help me! I must...

CRATCHIT

Sir, today... Christmas.

SCROOGE

(turning on him furiously)

Don't tell ME what day it is. I KNOW what day it is. If anyone knows what day it is today it's I!

CRATCHIT

I'm very sorry I'm sure, Mr Scrooge. But you did say... I mean, you did promise and I... well I...

SCROOGE

(still furious)

Where is he?

CRATCHIT

Where's who, sir?

SCROOGE

That boy of yours. The sickly one. Where is he?

BOB CRATCHIT

If you mean Tim, Sir, there's nothing sickly about our Tim...

(to FRED, remembering his manners)

Good day to you, sir.

SCROOGE

(rasping)

Be quiet!

FRED

(gentle but firm)

Uncle!

SCROOGE
You!

CRATCHIT
Sir?

SCROOGE
You listen to me. Are you listening? You better be listening!

CRATCHIT
I'm not sure what's brought you here today but...

SCROOGE
I'm doubling your wages!

CRATCHIT
(astonished)
Sir?

SCROOGE
(as the ideas come to him)
You're right. Not enough! You'll need more. Much more! And somewhere better to live. Somewhere with light and space and fresh air. And a garden! Where the children can grow strong. And time off to watch them!

(still seeming to threaten)
Don't argue with me, sir. Unless you want me to raise your salary more. Is that what you want? Is it? Nothing to say? Then I have no choice but agree!

He offers his hand. In a daze, BOB shakes his hand.
You drive a hard bargain.

Enter ACTOR 2—MRS CRATCHIT, joins
CRATCHIT.

MRS. CRATCHIT
Who is it, Robert? It's not another goose is it? I'm sure I don't know what to do with the last one arrived. It's that big.

(she sees SCROOGE)
Oh. Pardon, I'm sure.

BOB turns to her, speechless.

CRATCHIT

It's... it's...

SCROOGE approaches her.

SCROOGE

Ebenezer Scrooge, at your service, ma'am.

CRATCHIT

(at the same time)

... Mr. Scrooge.

She screams. FRED brings a chair, helps her to sit.

SCROOGE

I'm pleased to know you, Mrs Cratchit. Indeed I am. I hope one day to know you better. Perhaps—if you have no objection—I might call you 'My Dear'? I think of you as my dear, my very dear.

He shakes her hand.

Where's that boy?

CRATCHIT

It's Tim. He means our Tim.

MRS. CRATCHIT

What does he want with Tim?

(to SCROOGE)

Excuse me, but... What do you want? He's a good boy. He doesn't do no harm. He's not as strong as some...

SCROOGE

The future will be changed. I swear.

BOB CRATCHIT

I don't understand, Mr. Scrooge. Indeed I don't!

MRS. CRATCHIT

(seeing that SCROOGE is in the grip of some great determination)

Hush, Bob.

SCROOGE

He will not answer for my sins. That much I promise. He will not pay the price. The children must be saved, Bob. The children must be saved! If we can't learn to be kind then we must perish.

Enter ACTOR 1—TINY TIM, crosses to SCROOGE who kneels to him.

Young master Tim... I would beg you...

CRATCHIT

Mr. Scrooge!

MRS. CRATCHITT

Let him be.

TINY TIM puts his hand on SCROOGE'S shoulder. He smiles. SCROOGE embraces him.

ACTOR 1—TINY TIM comes forward. SCROOGE goes to one side.

ACTOR 1—TIMOTHY CRATCHIT

I didn't die. Not that day or any of the days that followed. All the many days that Mr. Scrooge was our friend. Later he said you can't stop grief, you can't stop unhappiness, it's always there beside you, but if you make one time of the year, set it aside to remind yourself what's past, what's now, and what's to come, you can look at your life with a steadier eye. He made my father partner, though he was never really one for business. Mr. Scrooge changed his practice, taking a more generous position and, strange to say, his business prospered. When I joined the firm it grew again till I'm proud to say it became famous on 'Change as a force for good, as much as anything can be in a city that sometimes seems overwhelmed by greed and avarice. Surrounded as we are by so much poverty and disease. But as Mr Scrooge liked to say...

SCROOGE

We all have our own small corner of the world. All we can do is try to make that right.

TIMOTHY CRATCHIT

His grief was Fred. When his wife died in childbirth he never could recover. Perhaps if the baby had lived—it was a boy: they were going to name him Ebenezer—he might have done better. As it was he couldn't stand being where he'd lost his chance at happiness and took himself

abroad. He had some money and his uncle did what he could but Fred was unreachable and soon disappeared from our lives. So I became both nephew and son to Mr. Scrooge and indeed I loved him like a second father. He never told the story of that night till his last Christmas when he told me of the Spirits, of Marley, the phantoms, and how he reckoned it was his sister brought it all about.

SCROOGE

It was Fan who saved me.

TIMOTHY CRATCHIT

That's how he explained that night. Which I suppose makes as much sense as anything else in life.

The ACTORS assemble SCROOGE'S room, comfortable now, setting his chair in its place beside a bright fire, bringing a side-table with glasses of port for a toast, all helping to settle SCROOGE into his chair, all of them content to be where they are.

He knew he was close to the end and asked one favor. Of course I'd have done anything for him but what he wanted was Fred, to see him one last time. He'd managed to track him down to where he was living in Italy where, it seems, he'd once taken his honeymoon.

How I left the city for the Channel packet to Dieppe and how I hurried south to find Fred is the subject for another story at another time. All I will say is when they were all gathered at table—mother had to have the doors taken down between the drawing room and dining room to make room for everybody—Martha and Belinda were both married with children of their own and there was my wife and our boys and Mr. Scrooge so loved to have us all gathered round. 'The one day,' he used to say,...

SCROOGE

The one day in the year we're all together.

TIMOTHY CRATCHIT

I'd telegraphed ahead and they'd set a place for me in case and one for Fred like always—Mr. Scrooge had never given up hope one day he'd

return—he was in a bad way, it took him a good while to start to get better but my wife insisted he come live with us till he could face the world again—but when we walked through the door together and Mr. Scrooge so frail and when he saw Fred...

He moves aside. Enter ACTOR 6—FRED from behind, revealing himself.

—I thought he'd die of happiness right then.

SCROOGE

Take my hand. Come.

FRED hesitates, unsure, ashamed.

Be brave! All will be well.

SCROOGE embraces him.

TIMOTHY CRATCHIT

We took our places, Fred and I, and raised our glasses to Mr. Scrooge—after all, as my father liked to say, he was the founder of the feast. He didn't last much beyond—knowing Fred was home and knowing we'd care for him he felt his work was done so he could go with a clear conscience, and so he did, with all of us about him.

He'd seen much and learned much and through it all he remembered that Christmas in the past and as he liked to say when he looked round the table at all us gathered there together...

They raise their glasses.

SCROOGE

God bless us.

ACTORS

God bless us every one!