

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

by Charles Dickens

adapted for the stage by
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(Version 2021)

Act I

Scene 1 The Stage

(A musical prologue starts the play, with the actors taking various props and costumes from a trunk brought onstage. At the end of the music the actors assemble and sit on the set as the lights fade to near darkness. A figure seen in silhouette enters and strikes a match to light the candle placed on Scrooge's desk. Lights fade up to reveal Charles Dickens holding the candle.)

DICKENS Good evening! And a very merry Christmas to you all! My name is Charles Dickens. I am the author of several books which may be familiar to you. I am also the author of the story you are about to see; and yes, in case you might be wondering, I am also: Dead. Please don't let that concern you. It is I assure you my problem and no one else's.

You see, a writer, if he is any good, and has a bit of luck about him, can live on and on through his work. In that respect I am a most fortunate man. But as so often happens in a writer's life, I found myself in the Winter of 1843 in a difficult situation: I had no money. There I was, with Christmas coming, unable to pay my debts. So it was with a sense of desperate determination that I sat down at my desk on a cold afternoon and began to write...A Christmas Carol. (*Enthusiastic applause from the actors.*)

And that is why we are all here tonight. Once a year at Christmas-time I am recalled to life, and allowed to venture forth once more among the living to share my little carol. And for that purpose I have enlisted the aid of these good actors. Let me introduce them to you! Lights, if you please! (*No change.*) Licht, bitte!

(Lights come up to reveal the actors upstage. Dickens leads the audience in a round of applause.)

As fine a group of players as you would ever wish to see!

(Dickens admires them for a moment.) Off you go! (The actors exit left and right.)

And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to take you back in time--to London, the 24th of December, 1843. To a bleak counting house, in a dismal

side street in the dark heart of the city. To the firm of Scrooge and Marley. Marley was dead, to begin with. Mr. Marley had in fact been dead for seven years. Yet Scrooge had never bothered to remove Marley's name from the door. (To offstage:) Scrooge? (The actor playing Scrooge enters.)

(To the audience) Scrooge. Ebenezer - Scrooooge. The very name says something, doesn't it? (To the actor, with a flourish of his hand:) Scrooge!

(The actor transforms himself into the character.)

He was a grasping, wrenching, clutching, wheedling, covetous old sinner. The cold inside his soul froze the features of his face into something as hard and unfeeling as granite.

(He beckons toward left and the Cratchit actor enters and crosses to him.)

The only thing he shared with his fellow man was this very coldness. The chill of his soul was carried into his home and his office. He did not warm it one degree for Christmas, nor for his poor clerk, Bob Cratchit.

Scene 2 Scrooge and Marley's

(Dickens exits left. Cratchit sits on the set below Scrooge, trying to warm his hands over a candle. He sneezes, blowing out the candle. He sneaks toward the coal bucket.)

SCROOGE AHEM!!! (Cratchit slinks back to his desk.) Try that again and you will find yourself looking for a new position, Mr. Cratchit.

(Fred enters.)

FRED A merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE Bah! Humbug!

FRED Christmas, a humbug?! Surely you don't mean that, Uncle.

SCROOGE I do. Merry Christmas, indeed. What right have you to be merry? What reason? You're poor enough.

FRED What right have you to be dismal, if that be the case? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE Ahhgh! Humbug.

FRED Don't be cross, Uncle.

SCROOGE What else can I be when I live in such a world full of fools as this? Christmas! What is Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills with money you don't have? A time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer. If

I had my way, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips

should be boiled in his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!

FRED Uncle! You can't mean that!

SCROOGE Nephew! I do. You keep Christmas in your way and let me keep it in mine.

FRED But you don't keep it!

SCROOGE Let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you. Much good it has ever done you.

FRED Uncle, there are many things in this world that have done me good, from which I have not profited. I count Christmas chief among these. I have always thought of Christmas when it is come 'round as a time of beauty. Not only for its most sacred origin, but for what it allows us to be, for the briefest of moments. (*Music begins to play softly throughout the rest of the speech.*) It is a time of charity, a time of forgiving, a time when men and women open their hearts to each other and think of people less fortunate as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. It is a time for giving and receiving the gift of love. And for that most precious of gifts, although it has never put one scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and it will do me good, and I say God bless it!

CRATCHIT Yes! (*He turns to see Scrooge glaring at him.*) No.

SCROOGE (*To Cratchit*) Let me hear one more sound from you, and you'll keep Christmas by losing your job. (*Turns to Fred*) You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.

FRED Uncle, don't be angry. Will you come and dine with us tomorrow?

SCROOGE I'd rather be hanged.

FRED But why not, uncle? You've not even met my dear wife.

SCROOGE Why did you get married, nephew?

FRED Because I fell in love!

SCROOGE Because you fell in love. Goodbye.

FRED But you never came to see me before I fell in love, uncle. You cannot use that as a reason to stay away now.

SCROOGE Goodbye.

FRED Uncle, I ask nothing of you; I want nothing from you but this: can we not be friends?

SCROOGE Goodbye!

FRED Uncle, to my knowledge we have no reason to quarrel so I shall believe we are not quarreling now. And though you remain stubborn in your beliefs I shall keep with the spirit of the day and wish you... Merry Christmas!

SCROOGE Get out!

FRED As you will, uncle.

(Fred starts to exit, then turns, sneaks up behind Scrooge and quickly puts an arm around his shoulder.)

FRED And a Happy New Year!!

(He gives him a quick kiss on the cheek and moves away to shake hands with Cratchit before Scrooge can hit him.)

FRED Merry Christmas, Mr. Cratchit!

CRATCHIT And a Merry Christmas to you, sir, and to your missus--

SCROOGE Cratchit!

CRATCHIT Yes sir, yes sir.

FRED *(He removes a coin from his pocket and gives it to Cratchit. He sings the last verse of "Good King Wenceslas" as he gathers his things)*

"Therefore Christian men be sure,
Wealth or fame possessing,
He who now shall bless the poor
Shall himself find blessing."

(Fred exits, singing. Scrooge, after chasing him to the door, turns and catches Cratchit waving goodbye.)

SCROOGE *(To himself)* There's another one. Fifteen shillings a week, with a wife and family to feed, and still he babbles of a Merry Christmas. "Merry Christmas!"

CRATCHIT Merry Christmas, sir!

SCROOGE Shut up. I'll go insane.

(Two ladies enter.)

1st LADY Good afternoon, sir! (*Looks to her companion, who consults a small book.*)

2nd LADY Scrooge and Marley, I believe.

1st LADY Have we the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE You may find addressing Mr. Marley no pleasure at all. He's been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago, this very night.

1st LADY Oh. I see. Indeed. I'm terribly sorry, sir.

SCROOGE For what?

1st LADY Well, eh... for... (*looks at 2nd LADY*)

2nd LADY For Mr. Marley-

1st LADY For Mr. Marley, of course, and for you, sir.

SCROOGE Tell me, did you ever meet Mr. Marley?

1st LADY No.

2nd LADY No.

SCROOGE Then there's no reason to be sorry that he's dead, is there? I'm not sorry, and I knew him for twenty years. In fact, I'm glad he's dead.

2nd LADY Well, nevertheless, we have no doubt that his generosity is well represented by his surviving partner.

1st LADY Yes, indeed. At this festive time of year, Mr. Scrooge, those of us upon whom fortune has smiled take it upon ourselves to make some slight provision for the poor and destitute among us, who suffer greatly at the present time. There are thousands, sir, thousands in want of common necessities, of common comforts, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?

2nd LADY Indeed there are, sir, although I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE Good. For a moment there I was afraid from the way you were talking, they were no longer in operation. It's very good to hear this news. Very comforting.

2nd LADY I'm afraid you don't understand, sir. We are endeavoring to gather a small fund to buy the poor a bit of food and drink and some means of warmth for this holy season. What should we put you down for, sir?

SCROOGE Nothing.

1st LADY You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE I wish to be left alone! Ladies, since you've asked, here is my answer. My taxes help support the establishments I have mentioned and those who are badly off must go there.

2nd LADY But many would rather die than go there!

SCROOGE If they would rather die, then they should do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides, that's not my business.

1st LADY Isn't it, sir?

SCROOGE No. It's enough for a man to understand his own business and not to interfere with other people's. My business occupies me constantly, madam. I suggest you go about yours. There's the door and if you'll please oblige...

1st LADY Oh!

2nd LADY Oh!

(Ladies exit. Scrooge looks at his watch as a church bell tolls five.)

SCROOGE Cratchit! You'll want all day tomorrow, I assume.

CRATCHIT If it's most convenient, sir.

SCROOGE It's not convenient.

CRATCHIT After all, it is Christmas-

SCROOGE It's not convenient at all, and it's not fair to pay a day's wages for no work.

CRATCHIT But it's only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every 25th of December. But I suppose you must have the whole day, *(Scrooge puts three coins into Cratchit's outstretched hand.)* so away with you. And be here all the earlier the next morning.

CRATCHIT Thank you, sir. And sir, have a Merrr....*(Scrooge gives him a withering look)* ...a pleasant evening.

(Cratchit hurries out. Scrooge puts on scarf and hat and starts out.)

SCROOGE *(Muttering, just loud enough to be heard, as if to the two ladies)*

"There are thousands in need, Mr Scrooge, thousands." Well, madam, I don't make myself merry at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry! That's what I should have said...Humbug!

(*Scrooge exits.*)

Scene 3 The Street

(*Lights dim on the counting house and come up on the street as Dickens enters.*)

DICKENS There you have it, my friends: As cold and mean a man as ever walked the streets of London. And listen for a moment, if you will.

(*A beggar enters, singing.*)

BEGGAR God rest ye merry gentlemen...

DICKENS Listen to the sounds the night had brought.

(*A boy enters, calling out his wares.*)

BOY (*In a sing-song tone*) Red rosy apples! Warm roasted chestnuts!

DICKENS The night itself had become a carol.

BOY Oranges, three a penny!

(*A caroler begins SILENT NIGHT which is taken up by the others. Dickens joins in the singing of the last line.*)

DICKENS Yes, the night itself had become a carol. But what did Scrooge hear? (*Scrooge enters*) Scrooge heard nothing. No words, no songs could penetrate his cold solitude. Scrooge walked home alone.

(*A man approaches Scrooge.*)

BILL Mr. Scrooge? Good day, sir. I was just on my way to your p--place of business, to ask for a-- week's --delay-- on the --p--payment of my debt.

SCROOGE You have already delayed me quite enough. Either you appear at my counting house tomorrow with payment in full, or you will be delayed in p-p-prison! Good day!

(*Scrooge continues on his way.*)

BEGGAR Something for a poor man on this Christmas eve, sir?

SCROOGE Certainly. By all means. Here you are.

(Scrooge hits him with his cane. As he walks along the street he begins to sing, punctuated by occasional acts of petty meanness inflicted on various passersby.)

Scrooge's Song

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Scrooge!"
"Happy New Year, Mr. Scrooge!"

What do they want of me?
I'll tell you what they want.
They want my money!
(heh heh heh) It isn't funny!

"Mr. Scrooge, a pleasant day,"
"All is well with you, I pray."
What they really mean to say
Is they want to make me pay!

What do they want of me?
I'll tell you what they want.
They want my money!
(ha ha ha) It isn't funny!

Invitations to come dine,
Making merry, drinking wine.
"May God keep you well and fine!"
You keep yours and I'll keep mine!

What do they want of me?
I'll tell you what they want.
They want my money!
(ho ho ho) It isn't funny!

Ladies press me with their pleas,
Beggars fester with disease,
Let them grovel on their knees,
Do they think that money grows on trees?

Let them wallow in the jug,
Let them fill the grave they dug.
People say, "You mustn't shrug."
Here's my answer in two words: Hum - Bug!

What do they want of me?
What can they squeeze from me!
Why can't they let me be?
Because... *(He knocks the boy's basket with his cane. As the boy bends over to pick up his wares Scrooge kicks him from behind, causing him to fall.)*

Now that's funny! *(Scrooge exits laughing.)*

(The actors set up Scrooge's house, with one actor taking position as the front door.)

DICKENS Now there was nothing particular about the door to Scrooge's house. Nothing peculiar about it at all. Just an ordinary door, *(The "Door" actor, facing front extends his left arm to shoulder level.)* nothing more. So explain to me if you can why it was that Scrooge suddenly saw in the door the face of his dead partner, Jacob Marley. *(Scrooge looks up and sees Marley's face.)*

SCROOGE AHHGG!!! *(He turns away in fear and then slowly looks back at the door. Marley is gone.)* Bah!

(He pushes open the door which creaks horribly. He steps into the house and closes the door. The "Door" brings a lit candle from behind its back and holds it out for Scrooge to take. Scrooge takes the candle and steps up into his bedroom.)

Scene 4 Scrooge's House

(Lights come up dimly inside his home. He takes his hat and coat off and pulls his nightshirt on. He puts on his nightcap and sits in the meagre light. He picks up a bowl of gruel and begins to eat. Suddenly a clock begins to chime and bells ring all around the house. He gets up, crosses to his window and closes the shutters. The sounds stop abruptly. As he begins to eat again he hears the sound of chains being dragged. Marley enters. His torso and arms are draped with chains. He crosses to Scrooge and sits beside him. Scrooge turns slowly to see Marley.)

SCROOGE AHH!!!! How now! What do you want with me?!

MARLEY Much!

SCROOGE Who are you?

MARLEY Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE Alright then, who were you?

MARLEY In life, I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE Jacob? You're looking a bit under the weather. Have a seat.

MARLEY You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE I don't.

MARLEY Why?

SCROOGE Because little things can affect the senses. A slight stomach disorder, for instance. An undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a fragment of

an underdone potato. Yes, that's it. I've made a great discovery. Marley, you are a potato.

(Marley screams and shakes his chains. Scrooge falls to his knees.)

SCROOGE Have mercy on me! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

MARLEY Ebenezer Scrooge! Do you believe in me or not?

SCROOGE I do, Marley. I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?

MARLEY In the life of every man, it is required that his spirit walk among his fellow men and travel far and wide. If his spirit does not go forth in life, he is condemned to do so after death. He is doomed to wander through the world and witness what he cannot share, but might have shared, and turned to happiness.

SCROOGE Most unfortunate. But Marley, you are covered in chains! Tell me why.

MARLEY I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it, link by link, year by year. I made it of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Does its pattern seem strange to you? Or would you know the weight and length of your own chain? Yours is a monstrous chain!

SCROOGE Jacob! *(touches chain)* It's hot! You come from.. a warm region?
(Marley nods) Oh Jacob! Speak comfort to me, Jacob Marley!

MARLEY Comfort? I have none to give.

SCROOGE But...what is to become of me..er, you, Jacob?

MARLEY Weary journeys lie before me. I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. An eternity without rest for a wasted life.

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

MARLEY Business! Humanity was my business! The common good was my business. Charity, mercy, simple kindness were all my business... Hear me, Ebenezer!

SCROOGE Yes, yes, Jacob!

MARLEY My time is nearly gone. I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance to escape my fate. A chance that I have procured for you.

SCROOGE You were always a good friend to me, Jacob, a wonderful friend--

MARLEY You will be haunted by three ghosts.

SCROOGE Is that..the chance you spoke of, Jacob?

MARLEY Yes.

SCROOGE Three ghosts?

MARLEY Three.

SCROOGE I'd rather not.

(Marley wails, joined by the offstage voices. Scrooge cringes at the sound. Marley cuts off the sound with a gesture like an orchestra leader's.)

MARLEY Without their visits, you cannot hope to avoid my fate. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell strikes one.

SCROOGE Couldn't I just take 'em all at once, and get it over with?

(Marley raises his hand to start the next wail. Scrooge cringes and the wail stops immediately as Marley drops his hand. Scrooge starts to recover but then Marley once more raises his hand which causes the wails to start again. Marley clearly enjoys this tormenting of Scrooge as he makes one more little jab with his finger causing the offstage howls and another shock to Scrooge.)

MARLEY *(Pleased at making Scrooge squirm)* Heh heh.

SCROOGE Marley stop that!

MARLEY Expect the second the next evening at one o'clock, and the last, the third evening at the stroke of one. Mark what I say to you, Ebenezer. It is your last mortal chance.

SCROOGE I will heed what you say, Marley.

(Mournful sounds fill the air.)

MARLEY My time here is ended. Look to see me no more. Remember, for the sake of your immortal soul, what has passed between us.

(Marley fades into the darkness as the sounds die away. Scrooge climbs into his bed.)

Scene 5 Scrooge's House, a bit later

(A church bell tolls twelve ominously. With each stroke Scrooge becomes more anxious, squirming in his bed.)

SCROOGE All right then! Let's get on with it! *(He looks around and sees nothing.)* Wait a minute. That was twelve bells. But it was after one when I went

to sleep. Could it be that I slept through one day and into the next night? Bah! It's not possible. Well, Marley said the ghost would be here at one o'clock--

(The bell strikes one. The ghost of Christmas Past appears suddenly behind Scrooge, who doesn't see her.)

--and here it is. And no ghost. So I was right. It was a dream and Marley did not visit me. My suspicion was correct. Marley was a potato. *(He addresses his bowl.)* Good night, Marley.

(He takes out his false teeth and puts them into the bowl. He turns and gives the bowl to the spirit.)

Waaa!!! Who... Who ah... *(He takes back the bowl and puts in his teeth.)*
Whoooo... *(He sits weakly.)*

SPIRIT Proceed.

SCROOGE Yes, yes... Are you the spirit who's coming was foretold me by my partner Jacob Marley?

SPIRIT I am.

SCROOGE Well then, who and what are you?

SPIRIT I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE Long past?

SPIRIT No. Your past.

SCROOGE And what business have you here?

SPIRIT Your welfare. And perhaps your reclamation.

SCROOGE Much obliged. I think.

SPIRIT Rise then, and walk with me.

(The spirit takes his hand and leads him toward the door. He stops as she crosses the threshold.)

SCROOGE Spirit, I am mortal, and liable to freeze in the cold!

SPIRIT Bear but a touch of my hand on your heart, and you will be sustained in more than this.

(They exit the house as the lights dim.)

Scene 6 A Country Lane

(Lights come up on Spirit and Scrooge as they enter the scene.)

SPIRIT Do you know this place?

SCROOGE Know it? Do I know it? I was a child here.

SPIRIT Your lip is trembling. And what is that upon your cheek?

SCROOGE *(Rubs at his cheek roughly)* Nothing. It's nothing. *(He starts to walk.)*

SPIRIT Do you remember the way?

SCROOGE Remember it? I could walk it blindfolded!

SPIRIT Strange to have forgotten it for so many years.

(Voices of children are heard playing, calling to each other.)

SCROOGE Hallo! Why there's old Dan! And Tye! And young Richard! Hallo! Halloo! They can't hear me, Spirit.

SPIRIT These are but shadows of people and places that have been. They have no ears to hear.

(Children's voices fade.)

SPIRIT Do you know this solitary child?

(A boy is revealed in a pool of light. He is seated, holding a book.)

YOUNG SCROOGE *(singing)* Everyone's with someone,
only me alone.
Only me, alone...

SCROOGE It is me. At my first school. My classmates have left me. They've all gone home for Christmas. They left me, alone.

YOUNG SCROOGE In my book of stories,
places I can go,
an island or a castle,

SCROOGE *(singing)* Only nowhere home.

YOUNG SCROOGE Only nowhere, home...

(A girl enters quietly behind the boy. She puts her hands over his eyes and

kisses the top of his head.)

SPIRIT And who is this young girl?

SCROOGE Why, it's my sister! It's my sister,

SCROOGE and YOUNG SCROOGE (*simultaneously*) Fan!

FAN Ebby! Dear Ebby! I've come to bring you home, Ebby!

YOUNG SCROOGE Home, Fan?

FAN Yes, little brother. Home forever and ever!

YOUNG SCROOGE But, father...! He's...

FAN Free! Released from debtors prison! Oh he's so much kinder now, Ebby. He spoke last night of you and so I asked if you could come home and he said yes, and sent me here to bring you. We're to be together at Christmas, and forever and ever!

SCROOGE Debtors prison... Indeed.

SPIRIT What is the matter?

SCROOGE Oh. Nothing. It's just that there were two ladies by my office last evening, and I... I wish that...nothing. Never mind.

YOUNG SCROOGE So I may go with you, at once?

FAN Yes-

YOUNG SCROOGE Whoop, Whoop!

FAN (*Acting very grown-up*) And you're never to leave home again!

YOUNG SCROOGE You've become quite a young lady, Fan!

(She responds with some playful gesture, possibly a "tag", and runs off with Young Scrooge chasing her.)

SCROOGE Fan...

SPIRIT Fan...

SCROOGE She was always such a delicate creature. A breath of wind might have withered her, poor thing. But she had a large heart, Spirit, a wonderful heart.

SPIRIT A wonderful heart.

SCROOGE Yes, Spirit. I'll not deny it, God forbid.

SPIRIT She died in childbirth, I believe?

SCROOGE Yes, as did my own mother, at my birth.

SPIRIT *(With a secret smile)* I know. *(Scrooge looks at her wonderingly.)* Your sister left one child?

SCROOGE My... my nephew, Fred.

SPIRIT Does he resemble his mother?

SCROOGE I never noticed.

SPIRIT Indeed. Let us travel further.

(Suddenly the stage is full of activity as actors bring in ledgers, benches, etc. for Fezziwig's office.)

Scene 7 Fezziwig's Office

(Scrooge looks around in amazement as Young Scrooge, now a young man, and Dick Wilkins take their places.)

SPIRIT Do you remember this place?

SCROOGE Of course! Why, I was apprenticed here!

(Fezziwig enters.)

FEZZIWIG Yo ho, my boys! There will be no more work tonight by special order of the proprietor! And I, as you well know, am the proprietor!

SCROOGE Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!

FEZZIWIG No more work tonight. It's Christmas Eve, Dick! Christmas, Ebenezer! Step smartly, boys!

(Mrs. Fezziwig and Belle enter with punch glasses.)

FEZZIWIG My dear Mrs Fezziwig! Will you dance, Madam?!

MRS FEZZIWIG Try to stop me!

SCROOGE Why look, it's Dick Wilkins as sure as I'm standing here! Dick was very much attached to me, Spirit. Yes, yes he was.

FEZZIWIG Let's have the shutters up, boys! Quickly! Quickly! Before a man can say Jack Robinson! Clear away, boys! We need lots of room for dancing!

(The music begins and everyone dances a "Roger de Coverley". As the dance ends Young Scrooge and Belle stand together. They and the other party guests hold their positions in a tableau.)

SCROOGE Belle.

SPIRIT The woman you loved?

SCROOGE The only woman I ever loved.

SPIRIT What happened to her?

SCROOGE I don't know. She went away.

SPIRIT As have your friends.

(All exit except the spirit and Scrooge.)

SCROOGE Old Fezziwig! He was as fine a master as any boy could want.

SPIRIT But why do you count him as special? He spent no great sum of money for this evening. Why does he deserve such praise?

SCROOGE It isn't that, Spirit! It isn't the money at all! Didn't you see him there? The way he treated us all? He held the power in his hands to render us happy or unhappy. To make our day in his service a pleasure or a burden. Just say that his power lay in the small looks and gestures that he rendered us in our day's work, things so small and insignificant that you could not count them, but the happiness that they brought was worth a great fortune...

SPIRIT What's the matter?

SCROOGE Oh, it's just that... I wish I could have a word with my clerk, Bob Cratchit, just now. That's all.

SPIRIT My time grows short. Come: let's visit another Christmas a few years hence.

(The lights change as they move to another area of the stage.)

Scene 8 Young Scrooge's Office

(Young Scrooge, a grown man now, is standing alone in a pool of light, writing in his counting book and muttering to himself. Belle enters and walks to him.)

BELLE Ebby... Ebenezer.

YOUNG SCROOGE Belle?

BELLE I have come to bid you farewell, Ebenezer.

YOUNG SCROOGE Farewell?! Where are you going?

BELLE It matters little. To you very little. Another idol has displaced me. It can bring you comfort such as I can never give.

YOUNG SCROOGE And what idol has displaced you?

BELLE A golden one.

YOUNG SCROOGE This is the way of the world! It despises nothing so much as poverty, yet condemns the man who employs his mind and spirit to avoid it.

BELLE You fear the world too much, Ebby. I've seen your nobler hopes and aspirations fall by the way, until only your passion for money remains. Have I not?

YOUNG SCROOGE If I have grown wiser, what of it? I have not changed toward you, have I?

BELLE Our contract is an old one, made when we were younger, and poor...

YOUNG SCROOGE But I was a boy!

BELLE And now you are a man. And you have changed while I have not. So I release you, Ebby.

(Belle starts to go; Young Scrooge stops her.)

YOUNG SCROOGE Wait. Have I ever sought release?

BELLE Not in words, no.

YOUNG SCROOGE In what, then?

BELLE In a... changed nature. A foreign spirit. Tell me, if you were to meet me today, and knew me to be a woman of no means, of no position, would you still seek my favor? Would you sing for me those songs of love?

YOUNG SCROOGE Belle... *(He pauses, unsure what to say)*

BELLE I think not. I release you, with happiness for the light I once saw in your eyes, and sadness that I now see the dying of that light. May the life you have chosen be kind to you, Ebenezer.

(She kisses him on the cheek, turns and walks away.)

SCROOGE Go after her!

YOUNG SCROOGE Bah. Let her go.

(Young Scrooge exits.)

SCROOGE Spirit, take me away from this place. I am an old man. My heart cannot bear this sorrow.

SPIRIT One shadow more.

SCROOGE Show me no more. I don't wish to see it.

(As they move away, Belle, some years older, is revealed sitting upstage singing softly to a baby in her arms. After a moment a man enters, beating the cold from his arms.)

Scene 9 Belle's House

BELLE'S HUSBAND Belle! *(Belle gestures to quiet him, indicating the children upstairs.)* Are the children sleeping?

BELLE All sleeping, but one.

BELLE'S HUSBAND *(To the baby, in a "goo-goo" voice)* And it's time for you to go to sleep! *(To Belle)* I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon.

BELLE Who was it?

BELLE'S HUSBAND Guess!

BELLE How can I?

(Belle's husband begins to gesture and mutter like an old miser counting coins.)

BELLE Tut, don't I know! Mr. Scrooge!

BELLE'S HUSBAND Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death I hear, and there he sat, alone. Quite all alone in the world, I do believe.

(Scrooge reaches toward them, staring. They shudder and look toward him suddenly as if reacting to an icy draft, then quickly rise and exit.)

SCROOGE Spirit! Show me no more. Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?

SPIRIT I told you these were shadows of things that have been! That they are what they are, do not blame me!

SCROOGE Remove me! I cannot bear it!

SPIRIT Touch my heart.

(The Spirit leads him back to his bed as he mumbles.)

Scene 10 Scrooge's House

SCROOGE No more. Spirit please, conduct me home. Show me no more. No more.

(She helps him gently to bed and stands a moment, gazing on him. He continues to mumble "no more" until she touches him lightly on his brow which sends him to sleep.)

SPIRIT Sleep...my child!

(She steps behind his bed and takes hold of his blanket to spread it more evenly over him. She is hidden briefly as she raises it for spreading. The blanket lowers slowly and she has vanished.)

SCROOGE No more. No more... Spirit! *(He sits up and looks around.)*

Where am I? Ah! It was just a dream! Spirits indeed! It's humbug, I say. Nothing but hum--*(One final look around to see that all is well, as the lights fade to black.)* -bug!

End of Act I

(Interval)

Act II

Scene 1 Scrooge's House

(Lights come up on Scrooge in bed, snoring. Behind him, a figure appears. This is the Ghost of Christmas Present. He regards Scrooge, then strides out from behind the bed and surveys the chilly, dark room. He takes out a pinch of glitter dust and tosses it into the air with a grand gesture and the room becomes flooded with light. He sweeps back toward Scrooge with a merry but ominous chuckle. Sits and enjoys a meal of grapes. He makes a gesture and the bell loudly strikes one. Scrooge bolts up in bed.)

SCROOGE Whaaa!!! *(Looks around but does not see the spirit.)* Will this night never end? I must get some sleep.

(He flops back on the bed, flat on his back, with his arm outstretched over the side of the bed. The spirit places a grape in Scrooge's hand. Without waking Scrooge pops the grape into his mouth and lets his hand fall free again. The spirit places another grape in his hand and Scrooge again pops it into his mouth. After a moment he gestures impatiently for another grape. The spirit obliges him.)

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT Good, aren't they?

SCROOGE Yes, very tasty, thank you. Very fresh.

PRESENT Very.

(Scrooge, suddenly awake, spits out his grape. Behind him the spirit rises and gives Scrooge a little wave. Scrooge pulls the blanket over his head.)

SCROOGE Good night.

PRESENT Time to get up!

SCROOGE I'd rather not.

PRESENT Look upon me, mortal, and know me better! I am the Ghost of Christmas Present.

(Scrooge's hand emerges from under the covers, gives a little wave, and disappears again.)

PRESENT Ebenezer! Look upon me! *(He yanks Scrooge's blanket away.)* You have never seen the likes of me before!

SCROOGE Never.

PRESENT Have you never walked forth with the younger members of my family,

my older brothers born in these later years?

SCROOGE No, I don't think I have. I'm afraid I have not. Have you many brothers, spirit?

PRESENT Almost two thousand!

SCROOGE A tremendous family to provide for. Spirit, conduct me where you will. Last night I did go forth with one of your brethren and I learned a lesson which is working now. If you have something to teach me now, let me profit by it.

PRESENT Profit, profit, profit! Bah, Humbug! Come here, little man! Touch my robe, and we'll go a'venting!

(Scrooge touches the spirit's robe, as the lights dim in Scrooge's room and come up on a street.)

Scene 2 The Street

(The street is filled with bustling shoppers. Two men bump into each other on their way.)

1st MAN Oi! Why don't you watch yourself?

2nd MAN Are you above that, you oaf? Watch yourself!

(The spirit steps closer and sprinkles them with glitter. Their attitudes suddenly change.)

1st MAN Let us not argue, friend. It's Christmas day, after all.

2nd MAN And so it is! God love it, so it is! May I help you with your package?

1st MAN Indeed you may. And I with yours.

(They hand each other packages, then say goodbye as each starts off in the direction he came from. After a few steps they realize their mistake and reverse course, laughing and greeting once more as they pass.)

1st MAN & 2nd MAN Merry Christmas! *(They exit.)*

SCROOGE There seems to be a peculiar power to your dealings, Spirit.

PRESENT There is. It is called Kindness.

(The actors have set up Cratchit's home. Scrooge and the spirit enter.)

Scene 3 Cratchit's House

SCROOGE Whose house is this?

(Mrs Cratchit enters with a small table. She spreads over it a worn table cloth decorated with small ribbons.)

SCROOGE Why, it's my clerk's house, Bob Cratchit! What are we doing here, pray tell?

(Martha Cratchit enters with a basket.)

MARTHA Hallo, Mum!

MRS CRATCHIT Oh bless your heart, Martha, there you are.

MARTHA I'm sorry I'm late, Mum, but there was so much work to finish up last night, and we had to clean up this morning.

MRS CRATCHIT Well, you're home now and that's what matters. And you brought us a fine little goose!

(They hear Bob's voice offstage calling a greeting, followed by Tim's voice repeating it.)

MARTHA It's Papa and Tim! Let's surprise them!

(Martha hides behind Mrs. Cratchit. Cratchit enters, carrying Tim piggyback. Cratchit carries Tim's crutch in his hand.)

CRATCHIT Hallo, my dear.

TINY TIM Hallo, mummy.

MRS CRATCHIT Hallo, Tim.

CRATCHIT Here we are, lad. *(Bob helps Tim to sit on a bench. Cratchit looks around.)* But where's our Martha?

MRS CRATCHIT She's not coming.

CRATCHIT Not coming? Not coming for Christmas day?

MARTHA *(Runs to her father and embraces him)* Of course I'm here for Christmas day!

TINY TIM Martha!

MARTHA Hallo, Tim!

(Tim and Martha embrace but Tim is seized by a fit of coughing. Martha looks with surprised concern from Tim to her parents. The coughing over, Cratchit gestures to Martha to take the child into the kitchen.)

MRS CRATCHIT Martha, it's warmer by the stove.

MARTHA Tim--come help with the goose!

(Martha and Tim go off to the kitchen. Cratchit steps to the hearth to warm his hands. Mrs Cratchit comes to him and removes his scarf.)

MRS CRATCHIT And how did our Tiny Tim behave?

CRATCHIT As good as gold, and better. Sometimes he gets thoughtful sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. When we were coming home from the church he told me he hoped people would see him there, because he was a cripple, and that he might remind them of the Lord on Christmas day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.

MRS CRATCHIT I know the angels are close by him.

CRATCHIT I'm sure he's getting stronger each day, isn't he?

(She doesn't answer, but exits toward the kitchen.)

CRATCHIT *(Alone)* Yes, I believe our Tim is getting healthier by the day.

(Martha and Tim enter from the kitchen, singing "Now bring us a figgy pudding")

CRATCHIT And now, my family, come to the table, all of you!

(The children and Cratchit sit at the table as Mrs Cratchit enters with a covered bowl and places it on the table.)

CRATCHIT It's a fine pudding!

MARTHA A lovely pudding!

TINY TIM A beautiful pudding!

SCROOGE A small pudding-- for so many people, isn't it, Spirit?

PRESENT No, not in their eyes. It would not occur to them to say it. No Cratchit would even think of uttering the words!

CRATCHIT In fact, Mrs. Cratchit, I believe this pudding to be your greatest success since our wedding day!

MRS CRATCHIT Oh, go on with you, Bob Cratchit!

CRATCHIT A Merry Christmas to us all, wife and children! God bless us!

MRS CRATCHIT and MARTHA God bless us!

TINY TIM God bless us, every one!

CRATCHIT A toast! (*All raise their cups*) A toast to the founder of the feast -- Mr Scrooge!

MRS CRATCHIT (*Putting her cup down and stepping away from the table*) Founder of the feast indeed! I wish I had him here! I'd give him a piece of my mind and see if he had an appetite for that!

CRATCHIT Please dear, remember the children. It's Christmas day, after all.

MRS CRATCHIT I can't imagine another day when one could find it in himself to drink to such a stingy, unfeeling man as Mr Scrooge. And you know it, Robert! No one knows it better than you, poor man.

CRATCHIT Please dear, Christmas.

TINY TIM (*Singing*) "Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat..."

CRATCHIT "Please put a penny in the old man's hat..."

MARTHA "If you haven't got a penny a ha'penny will do..."

(*Mrs Cratchit, her anger blunted but not dispelled, semi-sings the last line of the verse in a flat voice.*)

MRS CRATCHIT "If you haven't got a ha'penny then God bless you!" (*The others give a small cheer.*) All right, I'll drink to his health for your sake, husband. And for the sake of the day, but not for him. (*In a perfunctory, polite tone as she raises her cup*) Long life to him. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. (*They start to drink as she quickly adds under her breath:*) He'll be very merry and very happy I have no doubt.

CRATCHIT To Mr Scrooge.

(*All except Tiny Tim drink a sip in silence.*)

TINY TIM (*Quietly, looking directly at Scrooge*) Merry Christmas, Mr Scrooge.

Tim falls into a fit of coughing, more serious than the first. Cratchit places a hand on Tim's forehead, checking for fever.

CRATCHIT Perhaps it's warmer in the kitchen. (*Cratchit lifts the child into his arms and carries him off left, followed by the others. The Spirit crosses to Tim's*

stool and gently lifts the crutch.)

SCROOGE Spirit, the child Tiny Tim, tell me, will he live?

PRESENT I see a vacant seat by the chimney, and a crutch without its owner. If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, the child will die.

SCROOGE No, spirit, please. Tell me, spirit, tell me that the child will live!

PRESENT If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, I will be the last

Christmas spirit to look upon the child. But what of it? If he is to die he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Man, if man you be in your heart, hold back your wicked talk until you have discovered what the surplus is and where it is. Will you decide who shall live and who shall die? It may be that in the sight of heaven you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's crippled child. Oh, God! To hear the insect on the leaf protesting of the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!

(The spirit offers his cloak to Scrooge, who takes hold meekly as the lights come up in Fred's house.)

Scene 4 Fred's House

(The spirit and Scrooge look on as Fred, his wife, and a few of their friends and relatives enter laughing and enjoying themselves immensely. Fred's wife looks about 10 months pregnant.)

FRED He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live! And he believed it, too!

WIFE Shame on him, Fred.

FRED He's a comical old fellow, indeed he is. And not as pleasant as he might be, but his offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.

WIFE But I am sure he is very rich, Fred. Isn't that what you always told me?

FRED But what of it? His money is of no use to him. He does no good with it. He certainly doesn't make himself comfortable with it. And I doubt very seriously that he is entertaining the idea of leaving it to us, Ha, ha!

WIFE Forgive me, but I have no patience for him.

FRED Oh, but I have. I feel very sorry for him, poor fellow. I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers from his ill humour? Only himself. And as for his refusing to dine with us, why, I think he missed a perfectly wonderful meal, everyone?

(All the guests agree wholeheartedly.)

And now, a game! You must all try to guess what creature I am.

(Fred turns away and then back with a fierce scowl.)

WIFE Oh, Fred, that's frightening! Is it an animal?

FRED Yes.

1st GUEST Is it alive, as we speak?

FRED Yes, very much so.

2nd GUEST Is it a savage animal?

FRED Very!

WIFE Does it growl and grunt sometimes?

FRED Yes.

SCROOGE It's a pig!

1st GUEST Does it live in London?

FRED Yes!

2nd GUEST Does it walk the streets?

FRED Yes.

SCROOGE It's a pig, you fools!

WIFE Is it a disagreeable old pig?

FRED Ha ha ha!....No!

2nd GUEST Wait a minute! It growls, and grunts, and walks the streets of London? I think I have it! It's your Uncle Scrooge!

FRED Bah, humbug!

(Everyone laughs and makes merry. Scrooge tries to laugh with the rest.)

SCROOGE *(Delighted)* That was a good one! *(Suddenly realising)* Wasn't it, spirit?

FRED He has given us much merriment tonight, I am sure. And it would be

ungrateful not to drink to his health. So in the spirit of the day, I give you Uncle Scrooge!

ALL Uncle Scrooge!

SCROOGE Why, thank you, Fred. Thank you.

WIFE God bless..(beginning "*The Wassail Song*") "the master of this house!"

FRED (*taking up the song*) "God bless the mistress, too!"

ALL "And all the little children that round the table go!
Love and joy come to you!
And to you your wassail, too!
And God rest you and send you a happy new year,
And God send you a happy new year!"

(All except Scrooge and the Spirit exit as the song ends.)

SCROOGE (*caught up in the mood, singing*) "Here we come a'wassailing
among the leaves so..."

PRESENT Let us go.

SCROOGE Must we, spirit? The night is still young. Let's stay for just one more game, shall we?

PRESENT Come. My time grows short.

Scene 5 Another Part of the City

SCROOGE Spirit, you look quite tired. And your back is bent with age. Are spirits' lives so short?

PRESENT My life upon this globe is very short. It ends tonight.

SCROOGE Tonight?

PRESENT Tonight at midnight. Come, the time is drawing near.

(*The lights change as they cross into the street. Two small figures dressed in rags appear, huddled at the feet of the spirit. They are weak, almost unable to move.*)

SCROOGE Who are those creatures?

PRESENT They are the children of Man. This boy is Ignorance, this girl is Want. Beware them both, and all their kind, but most of all beware the boy. For in his

face is written Doom, lest the future be changed. Beware them, Ebenezer.

(The figures crawl toward Scrooge, moaning and stretching out their arms like beggars. They become more aggressive, clutching at his nightshirt.)

SCROOGE Have they no food, no refuge?

PRESENT *(sings slowly.)* Are there no prisons? Are there no work houses?
Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?

SCROOGE *(The figures have become animalistic, clutching at Scrooge until he falls to his knees.)* No, spirit, no please! Let me take back those words!

(The figures now cover Scrooge as if to devour him while making savage growling sounds. The Spirit extends his arms over Scrooge as if to shield him. An ominous chord strikes. The figures raise their heads in alarm and scurry offstage.)

PRESENT *(A whisper)* I am no more! *(The Spirit backs away into the wings.)*

Scene 6 Scrooge's House

(Lights come up to reveal Scrooge collapsed by his bed. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come stands silently some distance away. He points at Scrooge as a bell strikes one. Scrooge does not see the spirit but senses another presence. The Spirit is in a black hooded cloak which trails onto the ground around him. A cowl covers his face entirely. Scrooge turns, as if against his will, to gaze upon the spirit.)

SCROOGE Am I... Am I in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?

(The Spirit continues to point at Scrooge.)

SCROOGE I take it you are going to show me the shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us? Is that what we are going to do, Spirit?

(The Spirit lowers its arm.)

I see... Spirit, I fear you more than any other spirit I have seen tonight. But I know that although your appearance is frightening, your purpose is to do me good, is it not? *(No answer)* Spirit, I am not the man I was before this night and I intend never to be that man again. So I am prepared to go with you, and do it with a thankful heart. *(Pause)* Will you not speak to me, spirit?

(The Spirit begins to walk.)

I see. I see, yes. Lead on then, spirit. Lead on. The night is closing fast and this is precious time for me. Lead on, spirit.

(The Spirit turns and Scrooge follows. As the Spirit stops and gestures with his arm the lights dim, and come up on...)

Scene 7 The Street

(Two couples enter, one from left and one from right. They meet near center stage.)

1st GENTLEMAN It seems the devil has got his own at last.

1st LADY So I'm told. Good riddance to him. What do you know about it?

1st GENTLEMAN I can't say I know much about it either way. I only know he's dead.

1st LADY When did he die?

2nd GENTLEMAN Last night, I believe.

(The couples meet and exchange perfunctory greetings.)

2nd LADY I thought he'd never die. What was the matter with him?

1st GENTLEMAN *(Uninterested)* God only knows.

1st LADY What has he done with his money?

1st GENTLEMAN I couldn't tell you. I only know he hasn't left it to me.

2nd GENTELMAN I dare say it will be a very small funeral. I can't think of anyone that would want to go to it.

2nd LADY Shall we go? Shall we make up a party and go? All of us?

1st GENTLEMAN I'll go, if there's a lunch provided. And by heaven it will be the first meal he ever bought for anyone!

2nd LADY And the last. *(Her companion laughs.)* I made a joke! I made a joke!

1st LADY and 1st GENTLEMAN Ha Ha.

1st LADY Well, "Merry Merry."

2nd LADY "Happy Happy."

(The 1st couple leaves. The 2nd couple begins to stroll off in the opposite direction.)

2nd GENTLEMAN Well, I will go if no one else will. I suppose I must be

considered his friend.

2nd LADY His friend?!

2cd GENTLEMAN (*Simpering*) Yes, he stopped and spoke to me-- once!

2nd LADY Was that another joke? Oh, Ha!

(*The 2nd couple exits. The Spirit begins to cross the stage as Scrooge follows.*)

SCROOGE Spirit... Why do you lead this way? Every step...It brings you closer to...Where are we, spirit? Why have you brought me to this filthy street? It stinks of crime and misery. I know this place! I've hurried past it many a day-- the thieves' quarter. Here the wretched would sell their very souls for a penny. But what business have we here, Spirit? What business?

Scene 8 Old Joe's Rag and Bone Shop

(*A decrepit creature with an eyepatch enters, carrying an old tray piled with rags, bones and assorted rubbish. He is Old Joe, the rag and bone man.*)

OLD JOE (*Calling out his wares in the street*) Bones and rags and what have you! Bones and rags-

(*He spies an old woman, furtively signaling to him. This is Mrs Dilber, a dirty hag with a tied-up bundle.*)

OLD JOE Mrs Dilber, as I live! (*He goes to her and speaks softly.*) Something for me? (*Mrs Dilber nods emphatically and grunts a "yes."*) Well, step into my parlour, my dear, and let's see what you've brought.

(*They go inside Old Joe's hovel. Mrs Fulch, a laundress, enters carrying a bundle and calls to him from the door.*)

MRS FULCH Pssst! Joe! I've got some lovely items to sell-- (*steps into the room and sees the charwoman*) What's she doin' here?

(*An undertaker's man in a frayed jacket and old stovepipe hat steps into the room. He also carries a small bundle under his jacket*)

UNDERTAKER'S MAN Hallo Joe! (*sees the women*) Well, boil my trousers!

(*All except Joe are embarrassed to see the others. There is a moment of awkward silence.*)

MRS DILBER (*Embarrassed*) Look here Old Joe. The three of us have met here without meaning to.

(*They start to slink off. Joe tries to stop them.*)

OLD JOE Well, there's no need to be shy about it. Step in, step in! You're all here for the same purpose, right? You're all just trying to make a living in a cruel world!

MRS FULCH (*Throws a bundle on the floor defiantly*) That's right, Joe! Every person has a right to take care of herself! (*Her indignation increases*) And I'll tell you what else: That old sinner always looked after himself and only himself, and let the devil take the rest!!

UNDERTAKER'S MAN (*Matching her righteous indignation*) That's true indeed! If he wanted to keep anything after he was dead, why wasn't he more human in his lifetime? If he had been, he'd have had someone lookin' after him while he was dying, instead of gasping out his last breaths alone by himself, the wicked old screw!

MRS DILBER (*She tops the others with her vehemence*) It's the truest words ever spoke!! HE-WAS-EVIL-SLIME!!! (*She spits emphatically to show her disgust, wipes the spittle from her chin and then turns to the Undertaker's man.*) Are you married?

UNDERTAKER'S MAN (*After a beat*) Well, open up the bag, Joe! I'm not ashamed to go first. Open it and tell me the value of it, Joe.

(*Joe takes a watch and chain from the bag. The undertaker's man grabs it from him.*)

UNDERTAKER'S MAN I'm keepin' the watch for myself.

OLD JOE (*He takes out a candlestick which looks the same as the one from Scrooge's bedroom. He examines it briefly.*) I can't pay you much for this old thing. Here's your money. I couldn't give you another penny if you boiled me. Who's next?

(*Mrs Dilber hands him her sack. Old Joe takes out a jar with dentures inside.*)

MRS DILBER Taif!! (*Points to her teeth.*)

OLD JOE Right. (*As he rummages through the items on his tray he discovers a dead rat and makes as if to throw it away when she reaches for it.*)

MRS DILBER Thankee Joe!

OLD JOE I always give too much to the ladies. It's a weakness of mine and will be the ruin of me. Next!

MRS FULCH (*Shoves her bundle at him*) And now undo my bundle, Joe.

(*Joe opens the bundle and pulls out a blanket like the one on Scrooge's bed.*)

OLD JOE What's this? You took the blanket from his bed, with him laying there

MRS FULCH Yes I did, and what of it? I don't think he'll be too cold where he's goin' do you, dearie? And here, Joe, use your good eye when you're gazing on this shirt. (*She holds up a replica of Scrooge's nightshirt.*) It's a fine linen, there's not a threadbare spot on it. They would've wasted it if it hadn't been for me.

OLD JOE What do you mean, wasted it?

MRS FULCH Putting it on him to be buried in. Somebody was fool enough to do it, and I was smart enough to take it off him again. And now he's laying there naked as the day, and I'm standing here better off for it.

UNDERTAKER'S MAN Ha ha. You see? Here's what it all comes down to: He frightened everyone away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead!

(They all laugh outrageously. One of them begins a song which is soon taken up by the others: a gleeful ode to the joys of grave robbing.)

(OJ) Don't be left alone when you're dead

(All) For you won't be left alone.

(UM) You'd better have a friend!

(OJ) Don't be left alone in your bed

(All) For you won't be left alone.

(MD) We'll strip you to the bone!!

(UM) If you're lying stiff and cold,
Then we feel rather bold,

Invading your domain.

(MF) We're a brotherhood of thieves,
Removing all we see,

We'll pick your remnants clean,

(All) And your loss will be our gain!

(All) Creeping through the night like hungry rats
We make our living well!

(OJ, UM) Don't be left alone when you're dead

(MD, MF) For you won't be left alone.

(MF) You'd better have a friend!

(OJ, UM) Don't be left alone in your bed

(MD, MF) For you won't be left alone.

(MD) We'll strip you to the bone!!

(MD) Your dead body has no worth

For anybody else:

You might as well be lost.

(MF) If you had a single friend
 (OJ) You'd meet a better end.
 (UM) It's not a lot to spend
 (All) When you think about the cost!

Creeping through the night like hungry rats
 We make our living well!

Don't be left alone when you're dead
 For you won't be left alone:
 You'll meet a tragic—(*They mime violent death, then raise their heads brief to speak the final word*) --end.

(As the song ends they're frightened by the sound of a policeman's whistle which causes them to scatter as they run offstage.)

SCROOGE I see! I see the lesson before me, yes! That man's unhappy case could very well be my own. My life tends that way now. Only, that man died alone without a trace of the comfort of human feelings. If there is any person in this town who feels emotion caused by this man's death, show me that person now, I beseech you!

(Lights come up on a young woman, standing on a street corner, anxiously awaiting someone.)

Scene 9 A Street Corner

(Bill enters with an expression of serious delight, of which he seems to be ashamed. He crosses to the young woman.)

MOLLY Bill! Is it good news, or bad?

BILL B-bad, Molly.

MOLLY Then we're ruined.

BILL N-Not quite. There is h-hope yet.

MOLLY No there isn't! Our only hope was for him to relent.

BILL He is p-past relenting. He's d...dead.

MOLLY Dead? Dead!!

(They let out an exultant cry of joy. Then they quickly look to see if anyone heard them. Molly lowers her voice.)

MOLLY He is truly dead?

BILL D--Dead as a... doornail. I wu...I wuh!...

MOLLY ...You went to see him to try and obtain a week's delay on our debt?

BILL (*Nods*) B...But... his nnn...

MOLLY ...His neighbor came out to tell you that in fact, he died the night before?

(Bill nods emphatically and they embrace again.)

BILL (*exultant, he speaks rapidly*) His pitiless ways are past and we will sleep peacefully now!! (*Not one stutter! Surprised and pleased with himself*) Huh!

MOLLY (*Strangely moved by Bill's sudden ability*) Oh, Bill!

(They exit left)

SCROOGE Is pleasure the only emotion caused by this man's death? Show me some tenderness connected with death in this town of no mercy, I beg you.

(The lights come up on the Cratchit house.)

Scene 10 Cratchit's House

(Mrs Cratchit and Martha are seated by the fire. Martha reads from a bible.)

MARTHA "And he called.. a little child unto him, and set him in the... midst of them.."

(Mrs Cratchit stifles a whimper, lays down her sewing and rubs her eyes.)

MRS CRATCHIT There. They are better now. The candle light makes them weak, and I would not show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time now.

MARTHA I think he has walked a little slower than he used to these last three evenings, mum.

MRS CRATCHIT I have known him to walk with... I have known him to walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder... very fast, indeed.

MARTHA So have I.

MRS CRATCHIT But he was very light to carry, and your father loved him so, that it was no trouble--no trouble. And there is your father now.

(Cratchit enters.)

CRATCHIT It's a fine bit of sewing, my dear. I'm sure it will be done long before Sunday.

MRS CRATCHIT Sunday! Do you mean that you went to the graveyard today, Robert?

CRATCHIT Yes, I did, my dear. I wish you could have gone with me. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But we'll all see it often. I promised him on his last night, that I would walk there and visit him on a Sunday. My little, little child! My little Tim! God help me. (*He composes himself.*) You know, I saw Mr. Scrooge's nephew, Fred, today and he observed that I looked a little down, you know. And I told him about Tim. And he said, "I am very sorry to hear it, Mr Cratchit. For you and your good wife." (*Pause*) I wonder how he knew that.

MRS CRATCHIT Knew what, my dear?

CRATCHIT Why, that you were a good wife.

MARTHA Everyone knows that, papa.

CRATCHIT Well said, Martha, well said. I'm sure they do. And then he said, "If I can be of any service to you at all, sir. Any service at all. Let me know."

MRS CRATCHIT I'm sure he's a good soul.

CRATCHIT You may be sure of it, my dear. Martha, come closer. There will come a time when we shall all part, and you go on your separate way. But I ask you on this night, that however and whenever we part from each other, that we not forget Tiny Tim, and this first parting that was among us.

MARTHA I won't forget.

CRATCHIT And let us remember: how patient and mild...(*he can't continue*)

MRS CRATCHIT ...And let us hold forever in our hearts the gentle lessons he taught us in his brief time among us.

CRATCHIT (*Looking at Mrs. Cratchit first*) I am very happy. Do you hear me, Tim? Very happy.

SCROOGE Bob...?

(*The Cratchit family react as if to a sudden cold draft. Cratchit stands and stares as if he could see Scrooge's face. He follows his family offstage.*)

Scene 11 A Graveyard

SCROOGE Spirit, something informs me that our moment of parting is at hand. Will you tell me who that man was these people spoke of? The man that died?

(*The Spirit crosses to a darkened corner of the stage and points to a monolithic*

(shape. Scrooge turns to look but then turns back toward the spirit.)

SCROOGE Spirit, wait! Tell me, these things you have shown me, are they the shadows of things that will be or the shadows of things that may be only? *(The spirit points to the shape.)* A man conducts his life, and certain ends are attained. But if a man changes the course of his life, the endings will change also. Tell me this is true, spirit! Tell me that I may yet change my life!

(The Spirit points. Scrooge turns toward the shape as a light reveals it to be a tombstone. He sees his name upon it.)

Dear God! Am I that man that lay dead, Spirit?! Am I that man? No, Spirit! Tell me no! Spirit! Listen to me! I am not the man I was and I will not be that man again. Why do you show me these things, if I am beyond all hope? Spirit, please tell me that I may yet change these shadows you have shown me, by altering my life.

(The spirit begins to cross toward the stone. Scrooge's next words cause the Spirit to turn and face him.)

I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year! I will live in the past, present, and the future! The spirits of all three shall strive within me! I will not forget the lessons you have taught me. Oh Spirit, tell me that I may yet sponge away the writing on that stone!

(The lights fade quickly and come up on Scrooge as he clutches the sheets of his bed. He is alone.)

Scene 12 Scrooge's House

SCROOGE Spirit, speak to me! Spirit! Where am I? I am in my own room. And here's my bed! And my blankie! I am alive! There is still time to make amends! Oh, Jacob. Jacob Marley. Thank you Jacob! I'm on my knees to you, Jacob! You shall see. I'm going to astound you, Jacob! The spirit of Christmas shall strive within me! I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say! I'm as light as a feather! I'm as happy as a drunken man! I'm as merry as a schoolboy! I am as joyful as an angel! A merry Christmas to all the world! Yes, yes, here are my hands. And there's the window. And here's where Jacob stood. It all happened! It's all true! Ha, ha, ha! I don't know what day of the month it is. I don't know how long I was among the spirits. I don't know anything, I'm just like a baby! That's good. There's nothing wrong with being a baby. Nothing at all. Whoop! Whoop!

(He goes to his window, opens it and looks out on the street. A boy hurries by, dressed in shabby clothes: a pickpocket.)

SCROOGE Hallo, there!

(The boy stops in his tracks without looking back at Scrooge. As he starts away

Scrooge calls him again.)

SCROOGE Young man!

(The boy stops again, turning this time to Scrooge.)

What's today, my young buck?

BOY What? *(He's suspicious, ready to run.)*

SCROOGE What's today, my fine fellow?

BOY Today? *(Thinking)* It's Christmas Day.

SCROOGE Christmas?! It's Christmas Day! The spirits have done it all in one night! Of course they have! Spirits can do anything they like! Hallo, my young man!

BOY *(Suspicious, non-committal)* Hullo.

SCROOGE Do you know the shop the next street over on the corner?

BOY *(Tries again to think)* Errr... Hmm... Yeah.

SCROOGE Excellent lad! Do you know if they've sold the prize turkey in the window? Not the little one but the great big one?

BOY What-- you mean... the great big one?

SCROOGE What an intelligent lad! Yes, my friend, I mean the one as big as you.

BOY Errr. It's hanging there now.

SCROOGE Go and buy it for me!

BOY Buy it!? *(He turns to go.)*

SCROOGE No, no, I'm serious! Here! *(He tosses a coin to the boy.)* Bring it here, and I'll give you directions on where to take it. *(The boy starts off slowly)* Come back quickly and I'll give you a shilling.

(The boy goes slightly faster.)

Come back in less than five minutes, and I'll give you half a crown.

BOY Don't move! *(He runs off.)*

SCROOGE I'll send that big bird to Bob Cratchit and his family! It's twice the

size of Tiny Tim. And they'll never know who sent it. That's as good a joke as I've ever played!

(*The boy enters staggering under the weight of a huge turkey.*)

SCROOGE Hallo! Here's the big bird! (*He reaches into his purse.*) Here, my young fellow! Oh, take the whole purse! Stagger with that over to 10 Camden Road, and give it to Bob Cratchit and his family! And don't tell him where you got it! And Merry Christmas!

BOY (*lurching off stage with the turkey*) Merry Christmas.

SCROOGE And Happy New Year!

BOY (*Straining*) Alright, alright. (*He exits.*)

SCROOGE Goodbye! Goodbye! Yes, indeed... yes! I must get out into the street!

(*As Scrooge puts on his coat the Door actor enters and gets in position as before. Scrooge opens the door which emits a loud creak as before. After Scrooge steps through he reaches back to close the door which then holds out an oil can. Scrooge takes the can and applies oil to the "hinges." When he closes The door it emits a long sigh of immense relief: a "Doorgasm."*)

DOOR Aaaaaaaaaaaooohhhh! (*Door actor exits as Scrooge crosses away.*)

Scene 13 The Street

(*He encounters the first of the two ladies who called upon him.*)

SCROOGE Ahhh!

LADY Ohhh!

(*She turns away from him and starts quickly to walk away. His words stop her but she remains with her back to him.*)

SCROOGE Excuse me, dear lady, how are you? I hope you succeeded yesterday in your endeavors. It was very kind of you. (*He makes a last hopeful attempt.*) A Merry Christmas to you. (*He turns to go.*)

LADY (*Turning toward him at last*) Mr. Scrooge?

SCROOGE Yes, although I fear the name may not be pleasant to you. If you will allow me... I should like to make a contribution of... (*He whispers in her ear*)

LADY (*Astounded*) Lord bless me, sir! (*Suddenly suspicious*) Are you serious?

SCROOGE Yes indeed, and not a ha'penny less! A great many back payments are included in it, I assure you.

LADY I don't know what to say!

SCROOGE Don't say anything, please. Just come and visit me. Will you visit me?

LADY Indeed I will, Mr. Scrooge!

(Scrooge takes her hand and kisses it. This action has an effect on both of them. Her voice drops to a sultry purr.)

LADY Indeed, I will!

SCROOGE Thank you! Thank you a thousand times! Bless you and your work!

(She exits as Fred and his wife enter from the other side.)

SCROOGE Merry Christmas, Fred!

FRED Uncle Scrooge!

FRED'S WIFE Uncle Scrooge!

SCROOGE Yes, my dear! I am your Uncle Scrooge! A Merry Christmas to you! Fred... you know, you bear a remarkable resemblance to your mother! Fred, I've made a decision-- I... I'm coming to dinner-- if you'll have me.

FRED Why bless my soul! If we'll have you!? Of course, we'll have you! Come along with us.

(They exit as Dickens enters holding a wine goblet, crossing to center stage.)

DICKENS Oh, it was a wonderful party. Oh, let me tell you it was a wonderful party. There was never a party like that one! Wonderful food! Wonderful games! Wonderful *(He holds up the goblet and looks at it.)* people! And right in the middle of it all, there he was! Wonderful old Scrooge! Ah, but he was up early the next morning. The one thing he had his heart set on was getting to his counting house before Bob Cratchit. If only he could catch Bob Cratchit coming late to work! *(Dickens exits.)*

SCENE 14 Scrooge and Marley's

(Scrooge hurries in, humming "Good King Wenceslas" under his breath, off key, but with spirit. He sees that Cratchit is not there yet.)

SCROOGE Late to work! Well done, Bob!

(Scrooge sits down at his desk and puts a scowl on his face. He then bursts into laughter. He forces the scowl back onto his face, then laughs again. He hears Cratchit approaching and composes himself just before Cratchit enters and tiptoes past Scrooge. He is just sitting as Scrooge speaks.)

SCROOGE Mr Cratchit! (Cratchit leaps to his feet) What's the meaning of your sneaking into work at this time of day?

CRATCHIT (Breathless) Mr Scrooge, I'm very sorry, sir. I am behind my appointed time.

SCROOGE That you are! Step this way if you please, sir!

CRATCHIT (Still panting after his sprint) Please sir, it's only once a year! I swear to you it won't be repeated! I was making rather merry yesterday, sir, there was the biggest turkey... Please don't dismiss me...My family... (He faints.)

SCROOGE (Alarmed) Cratchit?

CRATCHIT (struggling to his feet) Yes, sir, I'm sorry... I'll gather my things.

SCROOGE No you will not gather your things! What you will do is stand there and listen to me, if you please! Cratchit, I won't allow this kind of behavior any longer, do you understand? And therefore, I am about to.. raise your salary!! (Cratchit stares at him.) Do you understand what I'm saying, Bob?

(Cratchit nods weakly and faints again.)

Bob! (He helps Cratchit to his feet and embraces him) A Merry Christmas, Bob! A Merrier Christmas than I have given you for many a year! I intend to raise your salary and assist you in every way with your family. But we'll discuss that this afternoon over a good meal, shall we? Now make up the fires, Bob, and here, go buy another bucket of coal before you dot another "i", Bob Cratchit!

(Cratchit exits as Dickens enters.)

Scene 15 The Stage

DICKENS Scrooge was better than his word. He did all that he said he would do and more.

(Scrooge and Tiny Tim cross down center from opposite ends of the stage. Tiny Tim walks with just a slight limp to Scrooge who embraces him.)

DICKENS And to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he..

SCROOGE ACTOR He became a second father.

(Dickens starts to speak but again his words are taken by the Cratchit actor as the rest of the ensemble enter from Left and Right. As they speak they form a line across downstage.)

CRATCHIT ACTOR He became as good a friend, as good a master,

MRS CRATCHIT ACTOR And as good a man as the good old city and the good old world knew.

FRED ACTOR It was always said of him that,

FRED AND BELLE ACTORS *(together)* He knew how to keep Christmas well,

BELLE ACTOR If any man alive possessed that knowledge.

DICKENS I couldn't have said it better! Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to ask one small favour of you all: Would you now be so kind as to turn to the person beside you and wish her or him a Merry Christmas? Go on, give it a try. ...There, you see, it did you no harm at all! And perhaps it has done us all a bit of good. My friends, let us keep Christmas in our hearts all the year round. And so, as Tiny Tim would say...

TINY TIM ACTOR God bless us, everyone!

The End