

A Christmas Carol

by

Justin Haigh

(Based on the story by Charles Dickens)

justin@justinhaigh.com
647.709.3464

NOTES TO THE READER / CREATIVE TEAM

SCENE NUMBERING: In some instances scenes are broken down into sub-scenes (5A, 5B, etc) in which there is a natural narrative break but the setting remains the same. These subdivisions are principally to aid in practical and administrative matters, such as rehearsal scheduling.

COSTUMES AND DESIGN: This adaptation is intended to be something of a departure from the Dickens original and, as such, characters' dress and appearance are generally left open to interpretation (with a couple of exceptions noted in the character list and script). While costumes should ideally be period appropriate and support the characters' essential qualities, Designers should not feel beholden to the conventional depictions and visual tropes typically associated with *A Christmas Carol*.

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance):**EBENEZER SCROOGE**

A miserly money lender.

BOB CRATCHIT

Scrooge's clerk, a modest but happy family man.

JACOB MARLEY

Scrooge's late friend and business partner; a ghost and a constant observer. Also the audience shepherd / guide.

NEPHEW FRED

Scrooge's nephew, a jovial and spirited young man.

BAILIWICK

A local gentleman or lady collecting donations on behalf of the poor.

BARLEYCORN

A local gentleman or lady collecting donations on behalf of the poor.

MRS. DILBER

Scrooge's housekeeper; no-nonsense and salt-of-the-earth.

LYDIA BERRYMAN

The teenage daughter of a tradesman indebted to Scrooge.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

A Spirit; benign, angelic, and otherworldly.

AUGUSTUS SCROOGE

Scrooge's father.

LITTLE EBENEZER

Scrooge as a child.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Scrooge as a young man.

MR. FEZZIWIG

Young Scrooge's employer; a jolly fatherly figure.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

Mr. Fezziwig's wife; just as amiable as her husband.

BELLE

Scrooge's Beau / Fiancé; a headstrong and affectionate young woman.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

A Spirit; boisterous and larger than life.

EMILY CRATCHIT

Bob's Wife; a loving wife and mother. A practical woman not afraid to speak her mind.

PETER CRATCHIT

One of the two elder Cratchit children.

MARTHA CRATCHIT

The other elder Cratchit child.

TIM CRATCHIT

The youngest Cratchit; a sickly child who walks with a crutch. A perpetually happy lad despite his illness.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMASSES YET TO COME

A Spirit; a silent female figure clad in black and whose face is obscured - not unlike a woman in full mourning. An angel of death.

OLD JOE

A dealer of stolen and ill-gotten goods.

LAD

A young working class man; a little rough around the edges.

ALICE

Nephew Fred's kind wife.

SETTING

London, England. Mid 19th Century.

TIME

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

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1. THE OFFICES OF 'SCROOGE & MARLEY' - DAY

Christmas Eve; the streets of London are alive with bustle and hubub, but inside the spartan offices of 'Scrooge and Marley' the quiet and solemn atmosphere is more akin to that of an exam hall.

Ebenezer Scrooge, a dour and grey-whiskered man, sits at a formidable desk, hunched over stacks of deeds and documents. His clerk, Bob Cratchit, sits at a smaller secretarial desk nearby, a shabby blanket around his shoulders. He tends to a large ledger book, scratching figures onto the pages with a well-worn quill. A coal scuttle sits at his feet, its contents sparse.

Jacob Marley - a pallid ghost - enters, unseen by the two men. His body is tied and laden with cumbersome chains that weigh his shoulders down and add labour to his steps. He points to Scrooge.

JACOB MARLEY

(to the audience)

The man you see before you here is Ebenezer Scrooge; a moneylender of great renown whose name, when whispered in frosted breath by those he passes in the street, holds the same sinister weight as that of Beelzebub himself.

He is thorough and uncompromising in matters of business and so his wealth is vast in all things that clink and shine. Why if shillings were friends, he would surely be the most called upon man in London town. And yet, he rarely calls upon these friends himself, preferring to keep his hoard kept away in a sunless vault, growing like a mushroom that will never be picked.

He is not a rich man in all respects though, for in those riches of humanity that cannot be rubbed together, his standings are rather pitiful. Where other men's hearts are furnaces of joy, affection, and kinship, his is but a cold and purely utilitarian pump.

I stand before you, not as a judge of he but as one who understands him, for I was once his business partner and his friend - his only friend - until I was taken from the mortal plane seven years ago this very night. As one with the wisdom of the other side to impart, I urge you to take careful heed of what you are to see unfold tonight; there is a little Scrooge in all of us, and if one neglects to stoke the furnace

(tapping his chest where his heart would be)

the same fate may befall any of you...

Marley withdraws.

Bob peers into the coal scuttle and glances over at Scrooge furtively.

SCROOGE
(without looking up)

If you continue to ogle that coal scuttle rather than attend to those accounts, I shall dock your pay for indolence. Do I make myself clear?

BOB

Yes, Mr. Scrooge. Very sorry sir. It's just that my extremities are rather cold and I'm not able to hold my pen steady. May I add another piece of coal to the fire?

SCROOGE

You may not. You have already used the day's allotment. If you are unable to grip your quill with the strength god gave you, bind it to your fingers with twine.

BOB

Yes sir, very good sir.

Nephew Fred bursts through the door, a festive wreath and small paper bag in hand.

FRED

Merry Christmas to you, Uncle Ebenezer! I bring you good tidings - and bonbons from the confectionery shoppe.

He extends the open paper bag towards Scrooge.

FRED (CONT'D)

Humbug?

SCROOGE

Bah.

FRED

Merry Christmas to you too, my dear Bob!

He shakes Bob's hand with vigor.

BOB

And to you, Master Fred!

FRED

Take some for the missus and children, eh?

Fred sneaks a few humbugs into Bob's hand or pocket.

BOB

Very kind of you, Fred.

Fred takes note of the blanket around around Bob's shoulders.

FRED

Why are you dressed like a Russian peasant? Heavens, it's frightfully cold in here. Put some more coal on the fire! Even the mice should know comfort on Christmas Eve!

SCROOGE

Is there anything I can do for you Nephew? Or have you come simply to interrupt the working day with your idle merriment?

FRED

Why yes, indeed there is, Uncle. You can join Alice and me for dinner tomorrow night. I have already sent two letters inviting you, neither of which you replied to, so you force me to make my case in person.

SCROOGE

I do not see the point of wasting good ink and paper on something that is of no interest to me.

FRED

No interest? Uncle! You are my only remaining flesh-and-blood, and I yours, and yet you make yourself a virtual stranger. I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be better acquainted? I have been married a year now and you have still not yet met my wife. It's scandalous! I will not take no for an answer.

SCROOGE

If you will not take no for an answer, then you are most welcome to leave without one.

FRED

I know you try to vex me, Uncle, but you will not spoil my mood. The season hath bestowed me with impenetrable armor of good cheer.

SCROOGE

Cheer? And what reason do you have to be cheerful? Certainly not because you married below your station to a dowerless woman, I should hope.

FRED

No, because I married for love. Because Alice is a companion, not a coin purse. A most wonderful and endearing companion. I wager you would come to the same conclusion if you were to meet her.

SCROOGE

And with what would you wager? Fanciful feelings are worth nothing at the bank.

FRED

Come, Uncle; it would mean a great deal to have your company for Christmas, and I promise you shan't be bored. We'll have rum punch and wassail, candied figs, party games-

SCROOGE

You could have Queen Victoria herself dancing atop a barrel of mead and I should still not be interested in your frivolities. The Israelites withdraw every Saturday for quiet contemplation and the Turks spend an entire month fasting. Why must we insist on expressing our piousness with such a tasteless lack of piety?

FRED

Because Christmas has grown beyond the mere marking of a holy occasion. It is a time for gratitude, contemplation, and thoughtfulness towards those we give too little thought. It gives us license to shed our apprehensions towards our fellow man - whether they be Christian, Turk, Israelite, agnostic - or curmudgeon-

SCROOGE

I beg your pardon!

FRED

-and to embrace them all heartily, as I embrace you. I believe Christmas-time ought to be a model for one's comportment year-round, but I shall bask in its fleeting effect of happiness and fellowship while I can. So I say bless it! Bless its festivity and frivolity, and Puritans be damned!

Bob can't help but clap a little, but quickly catches himself.

SCROOGE

Bah! You keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

FRED

If you insist. I will leave you to your devices, but please know my offer stands should your mood alter. Good day, Uncle. Good day, Bob. And a very merry-

SCROOGE

If you finish that utterance I shall send you into the streets wearing that wreath as a corset.

Before Fred can reply, Mr. Bailiwick and Mr. Barleycorn knock at the door and enter. Fred recognizes them.

FRED

Mr. Bailiwick! Mr. Barleycorn!

MR. BAILIWICK

Why, hello Mr. Hartwell! What a delightful surprise! It has been far too long.

MR. BARLEYCORN

Yes, too long indeed!

FRED

I wholeheartedly agree! Unfortunately, I am just taking my leave - but I hope you will consider popping by tomorrow evening to make merry with us; it seems as though we will have an extra place at the table.

MR. BAILIWICK

You are most gracious!

FRED

Say nothing of it. Good day, gentlemen!

MR. BAILIWICK AND MR. BARLEYCORN

Good day!

Fred exits.

SCROOGE

I see you are amicably acquainted with my Nephew - but I will not hold that against you. What business brings you here?

MR. BAILIWICK

Very amusing sir! Mr. Scrooge and Mr. Marley we presume?

SCROOGE

I am Scrooge, but Marley has long been deceased. This is my clerk.

BOB

Bob Cratchit, at your service.

MR. BARLEYCORN

Forgive our error Mr. Scrooge; the sign above your door still reads-

SCROOGE

I am very aware of what it reads since I pass under it twice a day. Now as to the matter at hand?

MR. BAILIWICK

Yes, of course. We too are men of business and it is at this time of year that we endeavor to share our good fortune with those less prosperous by making some provisions for common necessities and a few modest comforts. There is a great deal of want in our cities to be addressed.

SCROOGE

Is that so?

MR. BARLEYCORN

Oh yes sir. There are many thousands, tens if not hundreds of thousands who suffer acutely of cold and hunger. It is most egregious. May we count on a contribution from you befitting this worthy cause?

SCROOGE

Are the debtor's prisons still standing?

MR. BAILIWICK

Yes...

SCROOGE

And the Union workhouses? The treadmills? Are they still operational?

MR. BARLEYCORN

Unfortunately so sir. Both still very much in use - although I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE

Well then, I think you should be content to know your trip home will be that much lighter as I have already made my contribution.

MR. BAILIWICK

Do you jest, sir?

SCROOGE

Not at all, sir. The Poor Law established these institutions expressly for the purpose of harboring "the less prosperous" as needed, and every year when the tax collector comes to bleed me, I am satisfied to know that some of it ensures that I shall not have to trip on them underfoot. If you do not approve of this arrangement, then I suggest you take it up with the Exchequer.

MR. BARLEYCORN

Mr. Scrooge! Have pity! These institutions are places of misery and woe.

SCROOGE

So much the better then; the wretched will not learn to avoid the pitfalls that led them there if the experience is a luxurious one. Let them taste misery and woe and you shall find them that much more determined to improve their situation.

MR. BAILIWICK

You are a hard-nosed man, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

And you are a fool if you think that coddling the poor will yield anything other than a horde of idle riff-raff. Now gentlemen, I bid you good day.

MR. BAILIWICK

You shall not have to invite us to leave twice. Come Mr. Barleycorn, let us away.

MR. BARLEYCORN

Indeed, Mr. Bailiwick. Yes, indeed.

The two men exit.

SCROOGE

Bah!

BOB

Sir?

SCROOGE

What is it?

BOB

It's half-five sir. Would you like me to lock up?

SCROOGE

Yes, very well. And let us pray that will end this parade of yuletide nitwits.

BOB

Sir, if I may, will you need me tomorrow?

SCROOGE

I suppose you'd like the day off?

BOB

The family is rather hoping to spend Christmas as one and I would like to oblige them, if it's convenient, sir.

SCROOGE

It is not - but I suppose there is no sense in keeping normal hours if the entire city will be at a standstill. Be here all the earlier the next day though, or I'll adjust your week's wages accordingly.

BOB

Thank you sir. Very kind of you sir.

Bob throws on his coat and heads towards the door.

SCROOGE

Just a moment, Cratchit.

BOB
Yes sir?

SCROOGE
Have you finished the notice of foreclosure for the Berryman house?

BOB
Almost, sir. I will have it done as soon as I return the day after next.

SCROOGE
Never you mind. Hand it to me, I'll complete it and deliver it myself.

BOB
It's really no trouble, sir. It'll only take me-

SCROOGE
I said hand it here. The foreclosure comes due tomorrow and that is when it shall be delivered. No sense in delaying the inevitable.

Bob takes the notice from his desk and hands it to Scrooge. Scrooge glances at the document, noting that it is indeed complete.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)
Not finished, eh? You mind yourself, Mr. Cratchit.

BOB
Yes Mr. Scrooge.

Bob exits hastily.

Scrooge folds up the notice of foreclosure and tucks it into his jacket pocket. He notices one of Fred's candies has been left behind on Bob's desk. He glances around to ensure he is alone, then pops the bonbon into his mouth and exits.

2A. SCROOGE'S SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Scrooge enters, now wearing a housecoat and slippers. The stacks of financial papers around the room betray the fact that his professional and personal life are intistinguishable.

He sits down in a large armchair. His housekeeper, Mrs. Dilber, enters.

MRS. DILBER
Good evening Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

I will eat in here tonight, Mrs. Dilber. A light supper will suffice.

MRS. DILBER

Very good sir.

Mrs. Dilber hesitates.

SCROOGE

Why do you stand there? Were my instructions insufficient?

MRS. DILBER

No sir. It's that - there is someone here to see you, sir.

SCROOGE

Here? At this hour?

MRS. DILBER

Yes sir.

SCROOGE

And you admitted them?

MRS. DILBER

I did, sir.

SCROOGE

Explain yourself.

MRS. DILBER

Perhaps it's not my place to say, but I rather think they ought to be heard out.

SCROOGE

I have already had a most trying day, and I am in no mood to entertain yet another stranger off the streets. Send them away. Do I make myself clear?

Mrs. Dilber plants her feet.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Do not test my patience, Mrs. Dilber.

Lydia Berryman bursts into the sitting room from around the corner.

LYDIA

Please do not be cross with your housekeeper, Mr. Scrooge. It was I who entreated her to allow me to speak with you.

SCROOGE

Who are you, you green thing?

LYDIA

My name is Lydia Berryman. You have business with my father.

*Scrooge glances over at Mrs. Dilber with a stern look.
Mrs. Dilber replies with her own steely glare.*

SCROOGE

Very well. But be quick about it.

Mrs. Dilber exits.

LYDIA

My father is a worthy man, Mr. Scrooge. He is a good father and a hard worker. He is a carpenter by trade and has never suffered any complaints for the quality of his craft. He is also a proud man which is why I have come here on my own accord and without his knowing.

SCROOGE

Hasten to the point.

LYDIA

He obtained a loan from you not four months ago to lease a workshop in which he can build cabinetry and furnishings. There is more money in it than common handiwork and it was a wise investment.

SCROOGE

The fact that I have a notice of foreclosure for your house in my pocket awaiting my signature, indicates otherwise.

LYDIA

That is the thing, sir. He suffered a grave accident at the lumber yard when a hammerbeam fell upon on his legs, and he has been unable to work since. The doctor said he will regain his strength in due time, but his impairment has meant little in the way of money coming in and he has been unable to keep up with payments.

SCROOGE

And so, what? You wish me to forgive the debt because of his carelessness?

LYDIA

Not at all. I do not ask you for charity, only for a small extension given the circumstances. We are able to repay the loan with the prescribed interest, if only given a little extra time. Since the accident, my mother has been working as a laundress, my brothers have left school and taken positions at the cotton mill, and I have sought any opportunities I can to bring in a few extra pence.

SCROOGE

Have you now?

LYDIA

Yes sir.

Scrooge mulls the situation.

SCROOGE

Turn around.

Lydia hesitates, confused.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

I said turn around, child.

Lydia does as she is told, reluctantly. Her back now to Scrooge.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Bend forward.

She bends forward slightly. Scrooge approaches her from behind. She tenses. He removes the notice of foreclosure and a pen from his pocket. He lays the notice on her back and signs it.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

If you think that I have built my business by surrendering to young women with weepy tales, you are sadly mistaken.

He waves the notice of foreclosure in her face with a cruel flourish.

LYDIA

Please Mr. Scrooge! I beg you sir! You shall have your money, I promise you! Please do not take our home! Do not make paupers of us! I fear the shame of it will kill my father.

SCROOGE

Then let him die and in so doing, decrease the surplus population.

She slaps him. Hard.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Get out!

Mrs. Dilber rushes in.

LYDIA

I'm sorry - I -

SCROOGE

Get out and never cross my path again!

Lydia exits, distraught.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

(to Mrs. Dilber)

And you! How dare you allow that impertinent urchin to enter my home and insult me. Your position is terminated effective immediately.

MRS. DILBER

Mr. Scrooge!

SCROOGE

You may pick up your belongings and remaining wages in the morning. As for a letter of reference; you can scrape it off the bottom of my boot.

MRS. DILBER

Oh, good luck finding a replacement that is willing to put up with a flinty miser like you! I would like to meet her and shake her hand, I would. Make your own bleedin' supper from now on! You can scrape it off the bottom of your other boot.

Mrs. Dilber storms out. Scrooge returns to his chair, weary.

2B. - CONTINUOUS

SCROOGE

(to himself)

What mischievous force did I slight to warrant such a rash of odious treatment? I would happily gild any man with the antidote.

A bell rings somewhere outside the room.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

I will not tolerate any more nonsense or confrontation, Mrs. Dilber!

The bell rings again, more urgently this time. Scrooge gets up. Jacob Marley emerges from the background, invisible to Scrooge.

JACOB MARLEY

Scrooooooge.

SCROOGE

Who goes there!?

JACOB MARLEY

Scroooooooge!

Scrooge grabs a fireplace poker and holds it at the ready.

SCROOGE

Show yourself, knave!

JACOB MARLEY

(whispering in Scrooge's ear)

Scrooge.

Scrooge whips around. Marley presses his palms against Scrooge's eyes, and removes them.

SCROOGE

Aah!

JACOB MARLEY

Do you see me now, Ebenezer?

SCROOGE

I do, but I do not believe it.

JACOB MARLEY

Do you know me?

SCROOGE

Jacob Marley, is that you?

JACOB MARLEY

It is.

SCROOGE

You are so young, yet so aged. No, no. It cannot be.

JACOB MARLEY

Do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE

Marley is dead and buried. You - you are no more than an ephemeral figment; a touch of madness brought about by this maddening day. Or perhaps a feverish image caused by a spell of indigestion; why you may be no more than a morsel of molded cheese or a forkful of sour beef.

JACOB MARLEY

Trust your eyes; there is more of grave than of gravy about me.

SCROOGE

If you are not of my imagination, then what are you?

JACOB MARLEY

I am a wandering soul. My body is indeed dead and buried, but my spirit continues to roam this world, ever present, ever watching, with no rest or respite. It was seven years ago that you last saw me, but I have been with you since, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE

Ever present? Ever watching?

JACOB MARLEY

Are you surprised? It was you that swiped the tuppence coins from my cold eyes before they shut the casket lid. How should I stop from seeing with eyes forever open?

SCROOGE

Bah! I did no such thing!

JACOB MARLEY

(at full, unearthly volume)

DO NOT QUARREL WITH ME!

Scrooge is taken aback.

JACOB MARLEY (CONT'D)

There is no sense in it. Do you not recall how like-minded we were? Every penny of ill-gotten interest a celebration, every foreclosure a victory. We wallowed in it, you and I.

SCROOGE

Aye, we did. You were a rare breed, Jacob. I do miss you.

JACOB MARLEY

Do not look back upon those days with fondness Ebenezer. These chains you see about me were forged with the gold and silver I amassed in life. Their luster gives me no pleasure for I wear them as a burden of my sins and greed. Never a minute does my back not ache, my legs not moan, and my arches not howl - nor can I sit to silence them.

SCROOGE

Is there nothing to be done? It pains me to see you in such a wretched state.

JACOB MARLEY

For me? No. My fate is sealed. But yours remains unclear, and that is why I visit you tonight. I do not know if you can yet be saved - that is not my domain - but I come to warn you that if you continue down this path of bitter avarice, there is no doubt that you will join the ranks of my kind soon enough. I can see the chains you have already forged for yourself. They are great and ponderous - even more ponderous than mine - and you add to them still.

SCROOGE

Please Jacob. Tell me what I should do. How much must I divest?

JACOB MARLEY

After all that I have said, you still only think in numbers? This is not a matter that can be settled by shuffling your accounts.

SCROOGE

Then what? Guide me!

JACOB MARLEY

There is no prescribed cure for a lifetime of misdeeds. This you must navigate yourself.

SCROOGE

But how should I do so?

JACOB MARLEY

You will be visited by three spirits tonight. Each one will be heralded by the chiming of a bell, just as I was. Heed them, and heed them well Ebenezer.

SCROOGE

Jacob! You grow faint Jacob!

JACOB MARLEY

Goodbye old friend.

SCROOGE

Jacob! Do not leave me!

Marley disappears. Scrooge looks about his surroundings, shaken and on edge.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Have I taken leave of my senses?
(calling out hopefully)
Mrs. Dilber? Are you still about?

No reply.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

No, my earlier conclusion was correct; this is not a rational course of thought. Specters are mere poppycock - the stuff of cheap novellas. I am simply in need of a good sleep to sweep away these animated cobwebs. Yes, off to bed.

Scrooge is about to exit when, once again, he hears a bell chime urgently ringing from outside the room. Scrooge holds himself steady.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Oh Lord, let me shed these nagging phantasms! I only wish to rest!

A bright light fills the room, forcing Scrooge to cover his eyes with his forearm. The light fades. As Scrooge lowers his arm, he discovers he is now in the presence of The Ghost of Christmases Past. It looks to him in a kindly manner.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Are you - are you one of the spirits that Jacob Marley foretold?

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

I am.

SCROOGE

Who are you? Do you have a name?

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

I am the Ghost of Christmases Past.

SCROOGE

Of all Christmases?

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

Yes.

SCROOGE

But you are so youthful.

The spirit is amused.

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

I only age but once a year. Come with me Ebenezer. Take my hand.

Scrooge hesitates.

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST (CONT'D)

The past is fixed and distant; I cannot harm you.

He takes its hand.

SCROOGE

Where do you lead me, Spirit?

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

Not far by foot, but a fair stretch by hourglass.

SCROOGE

I hope you do not always speak in obtuse riddles.

It smiles at him, and leads him out.

3. SCROOGE'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

Scrooge and the Ghost enter. A young boy sits alone, reading a book.

SCROOGE

That boy. Why does he take no notice of us?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

We look upon a time long ago and what we see is already written. He cannot see or hear us any more than the characters of a novel can the reader.

SCROOGE

He looks so familiar. Who is he, Spirit?

The spirit does not answer, but gestures for Scrooge to observe.

Augustus Scrooge enters. The boy leaps up and runs to him.

SCROOGE AND LITTLE EBENEZER (CONT'D)

(in unison)

Father!

AUGUSTUS

Ebenezer my boy!

He scoops the boy up.

AUGUSTUS (CONT'D)

My, you are growing larger every day!

LITTLE EBENEZER

I am third tallest in my class!

AUGUSTUS

And I am happy to hear it!

LITTLE EBENEZER

You are home early, Father.

He sets him down.

AUGUSTUS

Will you sit with me a moment?

SCROOGE

Oh Spirit, this memory comes back to me now like a crashing wave. It brings me joy to see my father again, but please, not this moment.

The ghost ignores his plea.

AUGUSTUS

I am ill-equipped to temper difficult news with soft words or silver linings, so I will be forthright with you, Ebenezer. I have made errors in my business, significant errors, and now I am required to remedy them in the manner that the law prescribes. For this reason, I must away for some considerable time.

LITTLE EBENEZER

But you will miss Christmas!

AUGUSTUS

I do not wish to, but I have no say in the matter. I know it will be hard for you, but you must be strong. You must be strong for Mother and your sister while I am absent. When sorrow and melancholy well up, push them back down and do not let them weaken your spirit. I know I ask more of you than what one of your years should be asked, but can you do that for me?

LITTLE EBENEZER

Yes sir.

AUGUSTUS

Good. Listen to me, Ebenezer. I will not lie and say that life will always be a warm and charming thing. It is better that you gird yourself to this fact sooner than later, as I wish I had. I have been too frivolous in my own affairs, and now it tears us apart. I am sorry, my son. Promise me you will not grow up to be the fool I am.

LITTLE EBENEZER

You are no fool, Father.

Augustus embraces his son.

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

Did the boy keep his word?

SCROOGE

He did. He- I obtained a position at Warren's Shoe Black factory affixing labels to the bottles. I worked ten hours a day and brought home home six shillings a week; enough to keep bread on the table.

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

And your father?

SCROOGE

He remained in debtor's prison for three years. He emerged with a bout of consumption that took him from us a only a few months later. Oh Spirit, you said you could not hurt me. What a vicious lie.

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

I do not manufacture these events, only illuminate them.

SCROOGE

Please, have pity and take me away from this. Show me a happier time.

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

As you wish.

It leads him out.

4A. FEZZIWIG'S WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A Christmas party is underway and the rustic structure is filled with revelers. Scrooge and the Ghost enter.

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

Do you know this place?

SCROOGE

Know it? I apprenticed here! Old Fezziwig was my master; a kinder man you could not find from here to Kathmandu. Bless my eyes, there he is!

Scrooge gestures to Mr. Fezziwig in the crowd, his spectacles upon his head.

FEZZIWIG

Mrs. Fezziwig? Mrs. Fezziwig?

Mrs. Fezziwig approaches him from behind.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

No need to bellow my name across the room, you old goose! I'm right here.

FEZZIWIG

Oh, so you are! Have you seen my spectacles?

She takes them off his head and gingerly places them on his nose.

FEZZIWIG (CONT'D)

Well, now don't I feel the fool! I don't know what I'd do without you, my plum.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

And I pray we never find out.

She kisses him on the cheek.

MRS. FEZZIWIG (CONT'D)

Now off with you! That hot gin punch isn't going to mix itself!

FEZZIWIG

Oh, quite right!

Fezziwig passes by a young man in the corner, scribbling in a ledger.

FEZZIWIG (CONT'D)

Come Ebenezer, put that away! No more work for today!

YOUNG EBENEZER

I'm nearly finished these accounts, sir. It shan't take me more than a few-

FEZZIWIG

Your ethic is admirable young Scrooge, but I won't hear of it! There is nothing in those books that cannot wait. Come my boy, join the fête!

Scrooge reluctantly puts the book away and steps a little closer to the festivities. Someone thrusts a glass of punch into his hand. He sips it gingerly while remaining at the sidelines.

SCROOGE

I did so enjoy Fezziwig's Christmas parties, even if I was something of a wallflower.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Look now; the wallflower is about to blossom.

Belle, a slightly young woman, is nudged towards Young Scrooge by her giggling gaggle of friends. She approaches the timid clerk.

BELLE

Good evening.

SCROOGE

Belle.

YOUNG EBENEZER

(immediately smitten, he hesitates)

Good evening.

BELLE

Are you an acquaintance of the Fezziwigs?

YOUNG EBENEZER

No. Well I suppose yes; that is to say I am Mr. Fezziwig's apprentice. Ebenezer Scrooge, at your service.

She extends her hand.

BELLE

Belle.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Just Belle?

BELLE

Is it not enough?

YOUNG EBENEZER

I'm sorry, I did not mean-

BELLE

Please don't mind me, I am only teasing you.

YOUNG EBENEZER

I do not mind you in the least. Are you a relation of theirs?

BELLE

No. Although I should think myself lucky if I were. I am a friend of their family. My mother and Mrs. Fezziwig were very close. Mrs. Fezziwig helped me secure a position as a sales clerk at Debenham's after my mother passed.

YOUNG EBENEZER

My condolences.

BELLE

Thank you, but it was some time ago.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Are you still employed at Debenham's?

BELLE

I am. Would you care to guess what I sell?

YOUNG EBENEZER

Perfume? Silk gloves?

BELLE

You are a romantic at heart, aren't you?

YOUNG EBENEZER

Oh, I wouldn't-

BELLE

Parasols.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Parasols! How charming! It must be rather exciting to work in such a fine shoppe and serve members of society on a daily basis.

BELLE

Less so than you might expect. The more of them I meet, the more I am convinced that, at the crux of it, people are people and no title or lineage changes that. It is a good position, but I'd much rather do, well, any number of things. Perhaps become a journalist, or an explorer, an inventor, or even an actor. I think I should like to have adventures, and see East India, or perhaps the Americas. I have heard tell that at the peak of the Province of Canada there are bears that are entirely white except for their noses, and great whiskered sea beasts with sabre-like teeth as long as your forearm! Can you imagine it? What a magnificent world we live in!

YOUNG EBENEZER

May I be so forward as to ask, do you already have a dance partner this evening?

BELLE

Yes, I believe I do.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Oh. I see. Which one is he?

BELLE

Well, he's wearing brown spats, woolen trousers, a black waistcoat, and a bright red cravat.

Young Ebenezer scans the room not realizing she has described his outfit.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Funny, I don't see him.

Belle untucks Young Ebenezer's red cravat and lifts it up so he can see it.

YOUNG EBENEZER (CONT'D)

Oh!

A pleasant silence.

BELLE

What an oddly quiet fellow you are.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Forgive me. It's only that I cannot say what runs through my mind, else...

BELLE

Else what?

YOUNG EBENEZER

Else, you should no longer speak with me.

BELLE

Well now I am thoroughly curious. Tell me what what you wished to say. I will not flee, I give you my word.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Truly?

BELLE

Truly.

YOUNG EBENEZER

I wished to say that someday, I think I should like to marry you.

She laughs, but not unkindly.

BELLE

Perhaps you shall. But first we must find out if you can keep time.

He smiles.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

Do you see what I see, Mr. Fezziwig?

She motions over to Young Ebenezer and Belle.

FEZZIWIG

I do indeed Mrs. Fezziwig. How pleasing it is to see young affection bloom under these old timbers.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

Go on then, give them a reason to hold hands.

FEZZIWIG

A splendid idea, my peach.

Fezziwig steps into the centre of the room to gather everyone's attention.

FEZZIWIG (CONT'D)

(to the entire room)

Hear ye, hear ye! I can tell that the gin has loosened your lips and augmented your natural volumes, so we might as well put the effect to good use and have us a sing song! What say you all?

The crowd voices their approval.

REVELER

Let's have something bawdy, eh Fezziwig!

The crowd laughs. A fiddler strikes up the tune of 'Old Nick's Brew'. The crowd assists with improvised percussion; foot stomping, knee slapping, spoon against tin cup, etc.

Old Nick's Brew

Wise men once told me true, liquor be Old Nick's brew;
That nectar will rot your core.
Your soul you will give up after but a single cup
- But you won't care after four.

Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
beware of the lass named rum.
Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
or soon you'll be-come undone.

Pat was a proud young lad who had a thirst quite bad
For drink with a fiery kick.
So he filled up his maw and not long after saw
His fine shoes covered in sick.

Rose was a maid so pure, she'd become a nun was sure
'Til she found a taste for wine.
After which off she went and lay with a bloke from Kent,
and now she's a mother of nine.

Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
beware of the girl named gin.
Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
or prepare for a life of sin.

Of good steady Ted it was frequently said,
He would never hurt a fly.
But after a pot of ale, he'd end up back in jail
For gifting you a black eye.

Old Mary's port-fed plight was to find her white knight,
Til she had a change in luck.
But what she could not see was the object of her glee
Was no knight, but a handsome duck.

Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
beware of the maid named beer.
Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
or into ruin you'll steer.

Parson Brown - man of God; mid-sermon off he'd nod
And snore out the good word.
His oft drunken sleeps left but two curious sheeps
As the whole of his flock to herd.

Farmer John - a lonely sort who yearned for some cohort;
 Scotch whiskey was his fuel.
 Best keep him dry than wet, for scotch drove him to get
 Amourous with his mule!

Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
 beware of the crone named tea.
 Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
 or a stuffy bore you'll be!

Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
 beware of the crone named tea.
 Hey diddle-iddle um, doodle-iddle um,
 or a stuffy bore you'll be!

*The revelers applaud, and then slowly fade away. Only
 Young Ebenezer is left behind.*

4B. - CONTINUOUS

SCROOGE

Spirit, what is happening? The ruckus ebbs and the revelers
 fade from vision! A thick frost of dust gathers upon the
 floor. Cracks worm their way through the plaster.

GHOST OF CHRISTMASES PAST

We move not from this place, but do travel several
 Christmases forward. What changes occur over such time, you
 perceive in the blink of an eye. Watch now, we have arrived.

*Young Ebenezer scribbles in a notebook while taking
 stock of the room.*

YOUNG EBENEZER

(to himself)

Two pounds sixpence for the tables. Five crowns for the
 curtains. Seven shillings for the candles. Couple of
 farthings for the quills.

Belle enters, a winter coat around her shoulders.

BELLE

Hello Ebenezer.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Belle!

(realizing he has forgotten
 his appointment with her)

Forgive me, I am just about finished these additions.

BELLE

Such a shame about dear old Fezziwig. I have many fond memories of him.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Indeed. Mrs. Fezziwig was very kind to put me in charge of the liquidation; I expect I shall make a tidy sum in commission.

BELLE

I'm sure Mrs. Fezziwig will be very happy for you.

Young Scrooge has his nose back in his notebook and misses Belle's sarcastic remark.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Ebenezer, do you still care for me?

YOUNG EBENEZER

What a silly question!

BELLE

Yet one you neglect to answer.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Of course I still care for you. Nothing has changed.

BELLE

Has it not? We used to be inseparable, now I struggle to get you to turn your head away from your insufferable business. I fear that I have been replaced by another.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Replaced by another? From where does this ridiculous line of questioning come? I have no mistress, I give you my word.

BELLE

No? What of gain and profit? Are they not your mistresses? You do lust after them tirelessly.

YOUNG EBENEZER

You speak as though such pursuits are a sin. Is it so terrible to want to build a safe and stable life?

BELLE

A safe and stable life? That is how you define your pursuit? Do not cast yourself in such a humble light. The artifice of it is tasteless.

YOUNG EBENEZER

And this quarreling is tiresome.

BELLE

We have been engaged three years now, and the more time passes, the more reason I have to believe our promise will never come to fruition. When we were both poor we were happy in each other's company and content to spend our nights telling each other of our dreams. Now that you are a man rising in rank and fortune, but I still a dowerless shop girl, I think you look upon me more as an embarrassment that you cannot discard rather than your beloved to cherish.

Scrooge remains silent.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Oh do not dispute it so loudly. You will wake the neighbors!

YOUNG EBENEZER

Belle-

BELLE

Save your breath; I will spare you the trouble. There is no sense in prolonging the inevitable. I fear that if we did, our once warm feelings would fester into bitter resentment, and I do not wish that. I still have a full heart for the gentle, oddly quiet man I knew you to be, and hope that he slumbers in you somewhere still.

YOUNG EBENEZER

Belle, please.

BELLE

I release you, Ebenezer. I release you.

She removes her engagement ring and hands it back to Young Ebenezer.

BELLE (CONT'D)

May you be happy in the life you have chosen.

Belle leaves. The memory fades.

SCROOGE

Damn you Spirit; you do have a taste for the painful.

No reply.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Spirit? Are you still with me?

Scrooge realizes it has vanished.

4C. - CONTINUOUS

A bell rings nearby. It is soon followed by a loud and boisterous laugh.

SCROOGE

Who goes there? Make yourself known!

The Ghost of Christmas Present bursts forth with gusto worthy of a circus ringmaster. It carries a jug of liquor, of which it has clearly been imbibing.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Ahoy there! Ahoy and salutations dear fellow! Come near, come near and let us be better acquainted!

SCROOGE

You are the second of Marley's spirits, I take it?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Correct you are, Master! I can see age has done nothing to dull your wits.

SCROOGE

Why do you call me Master?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Why, because I am the Ghost of Christmas Present, and since it is Christmas-time, I am at your service!

SCROOGE

In that case, I should like it if you returned me home to bed.

The spirit laughs again.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

A sharp wit indeed! Come sir, have a pull of grog and warm your bones.

SCROOGE

Thank you, but I do not think I could manage the effects of two brands of spirit tonight.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Suit yourself; that much more for me!

The ghost takes an impossibly large swig from the bottle.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT (CONT'D)

Most invigorating! Shall we go?

SCROOGE

Go where? Not that I expect I will get a forthright answer from you.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Then I will not disappoint by giving you one!
(offering him the bottle one
more time)
Last chance before we fly.

SCROOGE

Fly? Oh heaven help me.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Take hold of my shoulder, Master. All will be well!

Scrooge does as instructed, reluctantly.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT (CONT'D)

Let us away!

SCROOGE

Ah! Spirit!

Scrooge grips the ghost's shoulders for dear life as they take flight, passing up through the rafters and into the chilly night air.

5. THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Scrooge and the Ghost fly over the English countryside. A wistful carol can be heard being sung in the distance.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Open your eyes. What do you see?

SCROOGE

It is as if we are a cannonball, sailing effortlessly above treetop and chimney. Strange, I feel no wind. I have never seen the country in such a manner!

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

An exhilarating sight, is it not? Look down. What now?

SCROOGE

Fishermen upon their vessels, singing mariner's shanties around an oil lamp. Coal miners scrubbing the black off while their wives prepare the pudding. Children pressing their cold noses against the lit windows of toy shoppes. Old dogs warming their bellies next to the fire while old men snore in armchairs nearby. Babes mesmerized by the candles and glass baubles hanging upon Christmas trees.

Well-bundled well-wishers trudging through the snow with cakes and parcels in hand. Cooks stuffing freshly-plucked fowl up to the neck with spiced apple and sausage. Carolers filling homes with song through open doors. It is - it is much to behold.

They set down gently.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Do these sights move you?

SCROOGE

They do.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Out of envy?

SCROOGE

No. Not envy.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Come, let us peer into a scene closer to you.

They exit.

6A. THE CRATCHIT HOME - EVENING

Scrooge and the ghost enter the humble but tidy home. It's a beehive of activity as Emily, Peter, and Martha Cratchit set the table for Christmas dinner. Simple home-made decorations festoon the walls and a fire crackles in the hearth, providing light and warmth for the close-knit family.

EMILY

Hurry up with those plates, Martha; Father will be back from his errands shortly. Peter, take the potatoes off the fire, would you?

PETER

Of course, Mother.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Do you recognize this home? This family?

SCROOGE

I do not. Should I?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It will become apparent soon enough.

EMILY

What am I forgetting? I feel like something is amiss.

MARTHA

Settle now, Mother; nothing is lacking.

EMILY

I just want to make sure it is a lovely meal. We ought to have a lovely meal, especially for Tim.

PETER

It will be a splendid feast. I am sure of it.

Bob Cratchit enters with his son, Tim, sitting on his hip. Tim holds a crutch in one hand.

BOB

Look who I found waiting at the corner for me!

SCROOGE

Why that's my clerk, Bob Cratchit!

EMILY

Look at you two sweet things. You didn't get too cold now, did you Tim?

TIM

No, Mother.

BOB

Don't fuss over the boy; he's a strong lad and can handle a little nip in the air.

SCROOGE

The boy, Tim, he is so small and frail.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

He is a sickly but brave child. His illness eats away at his strength but not his temperament.

TIM

It smells wonderful, Mother! I do hope we are having goose again like last year!

Emily searches in vain for words that will not disappoint her son. Bob jumps in.

BOB

Alas, the farmer told me that the geese this year were a mean breed, and a mean goose means bitter meat. Not a pleasant dish fit for such an occasion as Christmas dinner. So instead we gorge on something even more succulent; buttered sweet potatoes - so named for both their taste and pleasant disposition.

TIM

Potatoes don't have a disposition, Father!

BOB

Oh no? Have you ever been chased or honked at by a testy potato, Martha?

MARTHA

Never.

BOB

Peter?

PETER

Nor I.

BOB

See; a potato has to do nothing at all and already its disposition is sweeter than that of a goose.

TIM

You are being silly!

BOB

Yes I am. Now go on, the three of you, and wash up for supper.

Peter and Martha help Tim over to the water ewer in the corner of the room. Bob and Emily step aside to speak away from the children.

EMILY

Bless you. You're a savior, you are.

BOB

Please don't say that.

EMILY

Why should I not if it is true?

BOB

Because it is not.

EMILY

Why do you bear down on yourself like this? What is the matter?

BOB

I was not able to secure the raise. I was not even able to ask; Mr. Scrooge was in no mood to entreat such requests.

EMILY

We will find a way, Robert.

BOB

(looking over at Tim)

He grows sicker every day, and it sickens me that we must ration his medicine out of need. The cost be damned; he needs the care of a proper physician, not an apothecary.

EMILY

Peter is nearly old enough to seek out work. I know of someone who may have a position for him which would bring in five and sixpence a week.

BOB

Is that enough?

EMILY

It is better than nothing at all.

BOB

I resolve that I will present my case to Mr. Scrooge tomorrow and pray that his humor is improved.

EMILY

"Present your case." It makes my blood boil that you should have to grovel for what you are owed. Why if that old buzzard had an ounce of common decency, he would already be paying you thrice what he does. His work hours have sixty minutes in them, just like yours. Why should his accounts grow fat with excess while yours stay barren and our children go without?

Bob looks to his children playing together happily in the corner.

BOB

Come, let this rest until tomorrow. Let us not spoil the mood.

Bob kisses her on the forehead.

BOB (CONT'D)

(to the children)

Shall we have a toast before dinner?

The family gathers. Cups of hot drink are passed around.

BOB (CONT'D)

To good health.

EMILY

To loving family.

PETER

To continuing happiness.

MARTHA
To Mother and Father.

TIM
And to Mr. Scrooge.

The mood shifts.

EMILY
Why to Mr. Scrooge?

TIM
Because Father says he has no one and loves no one. He must be very lonely at Christmas.

The other four Cratchits share a knowing glance.

EMILY
(reluctantly)
To Mr. Scrooge.

TIM
Merry Christmas!

ALL
Merry Christmas!

SCROOGE
Bless that innocent boy. Tell me, Spirit- Spirit?

The ghost has vanished. The scene before Scrooge dims and comes to a standstill.

6B. - CONTINUOUS

A bell rings nearby, this time more slowly and deliberately than the previous apparitions. A sickly and unearthly light illuminates the doorway; through it the Ghost of Christmases Yet to Come enters, ushering a chill into the room. Scrooge is perturbed by its ominous appearance.

SCROOGE
You are the third spirit?

It faces him, still and silent.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)
If the pattern holds true, then I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmases Yet to Come? Yes?

No reply.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

If you can conjure visions of the future, then tell me, Spirit, what becomes of tiny Tim?

The spirit turns to Tim and raises its hand invitingly. Tim, as though in a trance, lays down his crutch and approaches the spirit, taking its hand. The ghost leads Tim, now walking without a limp, towards the illuminated portal and lets go. Scrooge watches as the boy walks, alone, into the light and out of sight. The light fades out.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

No. Say it isn't so. Tell me he lives.

The specter ignores his pleas and turns to the still frozen scene. It comes to life once again. The mood is much more sedate. Peter breaks the silence.

PETER

Shall we have a toast before dinner?

Cups are filled.

PETER (CONT'D)

To Tim.

MARTHA

To Tim.

EMILY

To Tim.

They wait for Bob, but he cannot bring himself to say the words. They drink quietly.

BOB

I visited his grave on my walk this morning. It was a serene sight. There was a blanket of fresh snow and the sun shone down upon it, unencumbered by clouds. The cold of the snow will keep the flowers fresh, I think. There were some bullfinches making song in a tree nearby. He would like that. He did so enjoy watching birds, didn't he?

MARTHA

He did.

BOB

(breaking down in tears)

Oh my son! My child!

Emily and the children gather around to comfort him.

EMILY

It's alright, Robert. It's alright now.

SCROOGE

Spirit. That is enough, Spirit. Please, I do not wish to see any-more.

The ghost considers his request, and nods. It gestures swiftly across Scrooge's eyes. Scrooge grabs at his face.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

What have you done? There is a fog before my eyes. I have no vision!

Scrooge stumbles about, reaching out for help. The Ghost moves towards the exit.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Where are you, Spirit? Do not abandon me here!

The ghost beckons for Scrooge to follow as if he were a dog. Scrooge lurches forward, compelled by an unseen force. They exit.

7A. SCROOGE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Ghost and Scrooge, still blinded, enter his bedroom. There is a corpse in the four-poster bed, covered head to toe by a sheet.

SCROOGE

Where have you brought me, Spirit? What is this place?

Mrs. Dilber and Old Joe enter.

MRS. DILBER

Follow me now, Joe; I'll show you the linens. And mind your stomach, it's a touch rank in here.

SCROOGE

That voice, there is a familiarity about it. Do I know these people?

OLD JOE

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!

(he crosses himself)

You didn't tell me the old bugger was still here!

MRS. DILBER

Nobody has claimed him, so here he lies until the coroner exhausts his inquiries.

OLD JOE

How now? I heard he was a man of many acquaintances.

MRS. DILBER

Business acquaintances, of which I wager none will miss his company or manners, and will surely not put out for his funeral. He had but one relation and they weren't on speaking terms. He was practically a ghost before he was even dead.

OLD JOE

Still, it's unseemly to conduct business over his body, even in my trade.

MRS. DILBER

Come now, Joe. I know you're a man of the world and not one to let a small distraction like that get in the way of a deal, eh?

OLD JOE

Maybe not the corpse, but that stench though!

MRS. DILBER

You can be thankful that the winter chill has crept its way in or it would be plenty worse, it would.

OLD JOE

How long has he been here?

MRS. DILBER

Hard to say. A week, maybe more? His clerk was the one who alerted the constabulary on the second day he did not present himself at the office. I was the only one they could find with a key to unlock his quarters, but it took them some time to track me down as I haven't been in his employ for two years now and was visiting my kin in the north. Now, why don't we cut this idle gossip and get on with business, eh?

OLD JOE

Suits me fine.

Old Joe explores the room, feeling the linens between his fingers.

OLD JOE (CONT'D)

I can give you seven crowns for the bed curtains and the drapes, and not a penny more.

MRS. DILBER

Only seven crowns? Come on now, you can do better than that! What of the sheets and the blanket?

OLD JOE

Ha! I don't think I should be able to find a buyer for those sheets, what with the stink and stain on them - and certainly not if they knew whose stink and stain it was. Seven crowns, take it or leave it.

MRS. DILBER

Nine.

OLD JOE

I said seven.

MRS. DILBER

And I said nine.

OLD JOE

Now listen here; This ain't Covent Garden, sweetheart. You are selling goods that aren't even yours to sell, so you should be grateful for whatever you can line your pockets with.

MRS. DILBER

And you listen here; I don't care for your type and don't plan on lining my pockets with a halfpenny of yours. The only reason you're here is so that I can squeeze what I can out of these rooms and return it to some of those he has wronged and robbed in life - of which there is a pitiful army. And I do not mind saying, I will squeeze you too if I must. Nine crowns.

Joe can see he has met his match.

OLD JOE

Nine crowns it is.

MRS. DILBER

Lovely! Let's settle up downstairs.

Mrs. Dilber and Old Joe Exit.

SCROOGE

Spirit, who was this wretched man that they speak of? Was he truly so loathed that they treat his remains with such indignity and find no shame in it? I am most disturbed by this scene but I grasp the importance of it; I know you tell me I walk in this man's shadow and may suffer the same consequences if I do not amend my ways. I heed you, as Marley instructed. I heed you well and ask you to release me from your spell.

The ghost gestures across Scrooge's eyes again, restoring his vision. Scrooge takes in the scene.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

This room. This room, it is mine. The bed, is mine. The body... a usurper, yes? A stranger in my place. That is the only explanation. Why is there a stranger in my bed, Spirit? Why does a stranger lie lifeless in my bed? Tell me! Who is he?

The ghost points to the body covered by the sheets.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

No. No, Spirit. I cannot. I cannot do it.

The ghost takes a step closer to Scrooge, pointing again. Trembling, Scrooge approaches the body and lifts the top of the sheet just enough for him to see its face. He recoils, and falls to his knees. Somewhere, a church bell starts chiming a funeral toll - low, menacing, and steady. The ghost moves towards him, slowly but with purpose.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Please, Spirit. Tell me this is not my fate, and that these passages can still be rewritten - I beseech you! I know now the vast harm and hurt that I am the root of; I have unjustly sought to punish the innocent for the pains I have borne, and my heart is heavy with shame for it. Please, I do not wish to die in such a state of virginal remorse; allow me to live so that I may correct the wrongs I have inflicted against my fellow man! I will honor the lessons of Christmas - past, present, future - and vow to live according to those lessons every day of the year. If you have a window into my conscience, you know what I say to be true!

The ghost is nearly upon Scrooge; it reaches out for him.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

I implore you, Spirit!

Blackout.

7B. - CONTINUOUS - MORNING

The funeral toll transforms into a lively and joyous chorus of bells. Sun streams in to the miser's bedroom through open curtains. The ghost and the body have both disappeared. Scrooge lies in bed where the body once was, soundly asleep. The sound of the nearby church bells rouses him. He bolts upright and awake.

SCROOGE

Aaah!

He takes stock of his situation.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

What is this? I am still here. I am still here!

Scrooge leaps out of bed.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

The fates have given me another chance. Oh bless you, Spirits! What a wondrous feeling this is! I haven't felt this giddy since... since... ever! I'm as light as a feather, as spry as a pup! There is a chorus of bells ringing inside me! Wait-

(he listens)

Why, those are the bells of St. Michael's heralding Christmas morn! The Spirits did it all in one night! I have not missed it! Oh heavens, I must gather myself; there is much to do!

Scrooge exits in a flurry.

8. SCROOGE'S FOYER - MORNING

Scrooge enters, a spring in his step.

SCROOGE

What a delightful scheme this will be! I pray I am not too late to enact it.

Scrooge flings open the front door. He calls out to a young man passing by.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

You there, lad! Yes, you! Come here a moment! I shall make it worth your while!

The lad enters.

LAD

What is all your hollering about, sir?

SCROOGE

How would you like to make half a crown?

LAD

I ain't never said no to coin that could be spent.

Scrooge laughs.

SCROOGE

What a charming turn of phrase you possess!

LAD

I have a what now?

SCROOGE

Tell me, do you know the poulterer's one street over?

LAD

Very well, sir.

SCROOGE

Good. And the prize goose; is it still in the window?

LAD

You mean the great fat one that is more beast than bird?

SCROOGE

Indeed I do.

LAD

Yeah, it's still there. What about it?

SCROOGE

Excellent! I want you to buy it for me and deliver it to this address.

He hands the lad a handful of coins and a slip of paper.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

And under no circumstances are you to inform the recipients of its origin.

LAD

That I can promise you; I have no bleedin' idea who you is anyway.

Scrooge laughs again.

SCROOGE

What a remarkable lad. Now off with you!

LAD

Yes, sir!

The lad exits.

SCROOGE

A wonderful start! Now where is my coat?

Scrooge turns about, looking for his coat. He finds it and is about to put it on when Mrs. Dilber enters.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Mrs. Dilber!

MRS. DILBER

Now listen here, Mr. Scrooge; I am only here to collect what I am owed and will suffer none of your usual blather or bile. Do I make myself clear?

SCROOGE

Oh Mrs. Dilber, you giant-hearted saint. What you are owed is an apology.

Mrs. Dilber is stunned.

MRS. DILBER

I beg your pardon?

SCROOGE

Mrs. Dilber, you look as though you have seen a ghost!

Scrooge laughs at his own joke. Mrs. Dilber continues to be bewildered.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

(to himself)

I suppose that is only funny to me.

(to Mrs. Dilber, earnestly)

I have much to atone for, Mrs. Dilber. So very much to atone for.

MRS. DILBER

(perplexed)

Are you unwell Mr. Scrooge? Shall I call a doctor?

SCROOGE

I have never felt better, or more in my right mind - I promise you. I retract everything I said to you last night, and I do hope you will stay on with me - after a paid week off of course. You have family in the north, yes?

MRS. DILBER

How did you-

SCROOGE

Here.

(thrusting some money into her hand)

This should be enough for a train ticket. If you leave now, you may still make it for Christmas dinner! Go on then!

MRS. DILBER

What on god's green earth?

Mrs. Dilber is about to exit when Scrooge calls after her.

SCROOGE

Mrs. Dilber! I nearly forgot. You know the Berryman family, I take it?

MRS. DILBER

I do.

SCROOGE

Good. Please give them this on my behalf.

Scrooge removes the notice of foreclosure still in his breast pocket. He tears it up with cathartic vigor and places the confetti in Mrs. Dilber's hands.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Tell them the loan is forgiven and that I wish Mr. Berryman the speediest of recoveries.

MRS. DILBER

I shall. I shall indeed.

SCROOGE

Merry Christmas Mrs. Dilber.

MRS. DILBER

Merry Christmas Mr. Scrooge.

Mrs. Dilber exits.

SCROOGE

Now where was I? Oh yes!

He finishes putting on his coat while singing a few lines of 'Old Nick's Brew'. He exits.

9. FRED'S PARLOR - DAY

Fred's party is underway. Every surface in his parlor is laden with cakes, nuts, clementines, and an assortment of other festive indulgences. Fred, his wife Alice, Mr. Bailiwick and Mr. Barleycorn, among other guests, are present and in the midst of a spirited party game. Scrooge enters, a hint of sheepishness in his step. The game halts as Fred catches sight of him.

FRED

Uncle Ebenezer!

SCROOGE

Merry Christmas, Nephew.

FRED

I did not think you would be joining us.

SCROOGE

I had a change of heart. I do hope you will forgive my egregious comportment; not only yesterday but for as long as you have known me. I have been most unfair to you and wish to renew our kinship - if you will allow it. Can you see fit to do so?

FRED

Yes. Yes, I should like that very much.

Alice joins Fred at his side.

FRED (CONT'D)

Uncle; allow me to introduce my wife, Alice.

ALICE

It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

The pleasure is all mine. Fred has told me much about you and I must apologize for not making your acquaintance sooner. I very much look forward to knowing you better.

ALICE

You are very kind to say so.

Scrooge catches sight of Mr. Bailiwick and Mr. Barleycorn on the other side of the room.

SCROOGE

Will you excuse me a moment?

ALICE

Of course.

(to Fred)

Fred, you rascal; he is hardly the ogre you described.

FRED

Don't take issue with me; I am just as bewildered as you are! I'd wager my hat he were an impostor had I not seen him only yesterday.

SCROOGE

Mr. Bailiwick! Mr. Barleycorn! Merry Christmas to you! I am very glad to see you both.

MR. BAILIWICK

(coolly)

Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Tell me, gentlemen; are you still accepting donations for the needy?

MR. BARLEYCORN

We are, sir.

SCROOGE

Excellent! I should like to make a slight correction to my contribution.

Scrooge pulls out a blank cheque and jots down a number on it. He passes it to Mr. Barleycorn.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

I hope that figure is more in keeping with the season.

MR. BARLEYCORN

Mr. Scrooge!

MR. BAILIWICK

That is most generous of you, sir!

SCROOGE

Say nothing of it! I am in arrears after all. If I may also ask; I have heard tell that you and others undertake a campaign to have the Poor Law reformed and the debtor's prisons shut down?

MR. BARLEYCORN

We do indeed.

MR. BAILIWICK

We already have several allies in Parliament - and elsewhere.

SCROOGE

Well you now have one more; consider your funding secure. Let us speak again in the new year and see if the process cannot be hastened.

MR. BARLEYCORN

We look forward to it, sir!

SCROOGE

Gentlemen.

Scrooge turns to leave the party. Fred catches him.

FRED

Do you leave so soon, Uncle? You have not even had a glass of punch.

SCROOGE

I will return anon, but there is one small matter I must attend to first. Keep the punch warm for me, will you Nephew?

FRED

I will. Merry Christmas, Uncle.

Fred extends his hand. Instead of taking it, Scrooge embraces his nephew tightly and with genuine affection. Fred is momentarily stunned, but embraces him back. Neither man utters a word, but their moistened eyes say all that needs to be said. Scrooge releases his nephew and exits.

10. THE CRATCHIT HOME - EVENING

The Cratchit clan have paused their preparations for Christmas dinner to admire the recently and very unexpectedly delivered goose upon their kitchen table. The children are bouncing with giddy energy.

BOB

I tell you, this is no device of mine. I have no idea where the plump thing came from.

MARTHA

It weighs more than Tim, I wager!

TIM

Let's put it on the scale!

EMILY

If not you, then who?

BOB

I haven't the faintest idea.

PETER

I wonder if it will fit through the oven door?

BOB

Since we owe nothing for it, and no conditions came attached to it, I do not see why we should not feast upon it.

TIM

Yes, Mother! Let's!

Scrooge knocks harshly against the front door.

EMILY

What now, another caller? Maybe this one brings a side of beef.

Martha opens the door and instinctively takes a step back.

BOB

Mr. Scrooge.

The mood in the room chills. Scrooge enters. He keeps his new-found joy concealed under a grim veneer.

EMILY

(to Bob)

What is he-

BOB

(to Emily)

Hush now - please.

SCROOGE

I know I said you may have the day off, Bob, but there is the matter of your employment to speak of, and there is no sense in delaying the inevitable.

BOB

Sir?

SCROOGE

You lied to me about having completed the Berryman foreclosure yesterday, Bob.

BOB

Yes sir.

SCROOGE

Just to spare them from hardship on Christmas day?

Bob hesitates.

BOB

Yes, sir.

MARTHA

Father?

BOB

Please sir, can we speak outside? The children-

SCROOGE

The children should see this.

EMILY

Now listen here, you brittle bag of bones; my Robert is as fine a clerk and as good a man as any in London, and if you think you can traipse in here on Christmas Day and-

SCROOGE
- make him partner.

EMILY
What did you say?

Scrooge cannot keep up the charade anymore and cracks a smile.

SCROOGE
I said, I would like to make Bob a partner. With the appropriate wages and benefits to match, of course.

BOB
Sir?

SCROOGE
I think it would benefit the firm greatly to have the guidance of someone with your understanding and kindness. "Scrooge and Cratchit". Do you accept?

BOB
Yes sir!

EMILY
Well, never in my life!

TIM
What's happening, Mother?

SCROOGE
Ah, you must be Tim.

TIM
Pleased to meet you, sir.

Scrooge gets down on one knee to shake his hand, eye to eye.

SCROOGE
And I am very pleased to meet you, young Cratchit.

TIM
Would you care to sit with us a while, Mr. Scrooge?

Scrooge looks to Bob and Emily for approval. They nod.

SCROOGE
Thank you, Tim. I would like that very much.

PETER
Shall we have a toast then?

BOB

Yes, lets! Martha, help me with the cups and the smoking bishop, would you?

While the Cratchits organize the toast, Scrooge steps off to the side.

SCROOGE

Jacob? Jacob Marley? If you are still with me, make yourself known.

Marley steps out of the shadows. Scrooge approaches him and presses two coins in his palm.

JACOB MARLEY

What is this?

SCROOGE

Tuppence for an old friend. Thank you, Jacob. Thank you. Rest ye well.

Marley clutches the coins to his breast and with a nod of appreciation, withdraws back into the ether. Scrooge returns to the Cratchits. He takes a seat next to Tim. Cups are passed around.

TIM

Merry Christmas, Mr. Scrooge!

SCROOGE

Merry Christmas, Tim. Merry Christmas, everyone!

The entire ensemble joins the scene for a finale song:

ALL

[To the tune of 'Here We Come A-Wassailing']

Here we stand a-caroling
Among our kin so dear;
Here we stand with drink in hand
And raise it in good cheer!

Love and joy come to you,
Let the season guide you true,
May peace find you, and lend you a happy new year,
May peace lend you a happy new year.

So let us sing, so bright and clear
In hopes to trade our mirth
For meat to fill our bellies
And for sweets to pad our girth!

Love and joy come to you,
Let the season guide you true,
May peace find you, and lend you a happy new year,
May peace lend you a happy new year.

We ask you this, now, to receive:
A wish before we part;
Let this spirit leave this house
And live now in your hearts.

Love and joy come to you,
Let the season guide you true,
May peace find you, and lend you a happy new year,
May peace lend you a happy new year!

THE END.