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Charles Dickens'
A Christmas Carol

Adapted by Lee Wilson

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I have endeavoured in this ghostly little book, to raise the ghost of an idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it. Their faithful friend and servant,

Charles Dickens
December 1843

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(*Doubling, tripling, etc. of characters is to the director's discretion. 8 actors minimum. Many small roles can be cut.)

DICKENS (a narrator): Nonbinary

OLDER EBENEZER SCROOGE: Male

CLERK (Bob Cratchit): Male

NEPHEW (Fred): Male

1st CHUGGER: Nonbinary

2nd CHUGGER: Nonbinary

HOMELESS BOY: Nonbinary

MARLEY: Nonbinary

FIRST SPIRIT: Nonbinary

FAN: Female

FEZZIWIG: Male

APPRENTICE SCROOGE: Nonbinary

DICK: Nonbinary

BELLE: Female

MRS FEZZIWIG: Female (Silent part. Dance choreography)

SECOND SPIRIT: Nonbinary

MRS CRATCHIT: Female

MARTHA CRATCHIT: Female

PETER CRATCHIT: Male

NIECE (Fred's Wife): Female

NIECE'S SISTER: Female
PARTY GOER 1: Nonbinary
PARTY GOER 2: Nonbinary
PARTY GOER 3: Nonbinary
PARTY GOER 4: Nonbinary
THIRD SPIRIT: Nonbinary
BUSINESSMAN 1: Nonbinary
BUSINESSMAN 2: Nonbinary
BUSINESSMAN 3: Nonbinary
WEALTHY MAN 1: Nonbinary
WEALTHY MAN 2: Nonbinary
OLD JOE: Male
WOMAN 1: Female
MRS DILBER: Female
MAN IN FADED BLACK: Male (Silent part.)
CAROLINE: Female
HUSBAND: Male
THE BOY: Nonbinary
PERSON: Nonbinary
GIRL: Female

Nonbinary - can be played by female, male, transgender, genderqueer, or nonbinary individual.

Stave I: Marley's Ghost

Close your eyes and imagine 1843. What do you see? What do you smell? This is where we are. A distinguished person enters. They look like a poet. Educated. Other worldly. You immediately feel at ease with them. A comfort. They have been summoned to talk to the audience. They are here for a purpose. As the narrator speaks, we see Jacob Marley's quiet funeral. What the narrator evokes you may show any way you see best in the background. The story begins.

DICKENS: Jacob Marley. To begin with: he was dead. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Ebenezer Scrooge signed it. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail. Excuse me, I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a doornail. I have, myself, regarded a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a doornail. Did Scrooge know he was dead? Indeed, they had been business partners for many years. Not only that, but Scrooge was also his sole executor and administrator. Scrooge his sole friend. His sole mourner. Scrooge himself, not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, solemnised it with an undoubted bargain. But, back to my original point, there is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

The firm was known as *Scrooge and Marley*. But Scrooge answered to both names. It was all the same to him. Oh, he was a tight-fisted, squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose,

shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chills him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. Nobody in the street ever stopped him to say, 'My dear Scrooge, how are you?', and dogs' tails would wag at his malignant eyes. But what did Scrooge care! He thrived from it. Scrooge's pores constantly spread a warning to all human sympathy to keep its distance.

So, so, so. (*They turn an hourglass*) Once upon a time – of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve – old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. The people outside walking in the street could be heard wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, because of the cold, bleak, biting weather. It was now dark, with many employees already at home enjoying well-deserved rest with their families. Candles flared in the windows as Scrooge kept his eye upon a dismal little cell through his big office's door - his clerk.

SCROOGE: You have plenty of heat from your candle. Do you see me with a big fire?

NEPHEW: (*entering from street*) A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE: Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW: Christmas a humbug, uncle! You don't mean that, I am sure.

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

NEPHEW: Come, then. What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE: Bah! Humbug.

NEPHEW: Don't be cross, uncle!

SCROOGE: What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer. If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.

NEPHEW: Uncle!

SCROOGE: Nephew! Keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine. There's another fellow, my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam.

Two people enter from the street.

1st CHUGGER: *(holding a book and papers)* Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge, or Mr Marley?

SCROOGE: Mr Marley has been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago, this very night.

2nd CHUGGER: We have no doubt his charitable-ness is well represented by his surviving partner.

1st CHUGGER: At this festive season of the year, Mr Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time.

2ndt CHUGGER: Many thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE: Are there no prisons?

2ndt CHUGGER: Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE: And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?

1st CHUGGER: They are. I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE: We still have minimum wage and shelters?

2ndt CHUGGER: Both, sir.

SCROOGE: Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course. I'm very glad to hear it.

2ndt CHUGGER: Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink and means of warmth.

1st CHUGGER: What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE: Nothing.

1st CHUGGER: You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE: Since you ask me what I wish, I wish to be left alone. I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the system and establishments I have mentioned.

2ndt CHUGGER: Many can't survive off that, many can't go there; and most would rather die.

SCROOGE: If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides – excuse me – I don't know that.

1st CHUGGER: But you might know it.

SCROOGE: It's not my business. I don't interfere with other people's and don't interfere with mine. My business occupies me constantly. Good afternoon.

They exit.

NEPHEW: Uncle.

SCROOGE: Leave it alone.

NEPHEW: I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round – apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin – as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when people seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. Though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, uncle, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!

The clerk involuntarily applauds.

SCROOGE: (*To the clerk*) Let me hear another sound from *you* and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation!

SCROOGE: You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go to Parliament.

NEPHEW: Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE: Why did you get married? But why? Why?

NEPHEW: Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE: Good afternoon.

Nephew goes to leave.

SCROOGE: (*Under his breath*) Because you fell in love.

Nephew stops and turns.

NEPHEW: Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now? I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE: Good afternoon.

NEPHEW: I am sorry, with all my heart. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So a Merry Christmas, uncle.

SCROOGE: Good afternoon.

NEPHEW: And a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE: Good afternoon!

Nephew stops at outer door to bestow greetings of the season to the clerk.

DICKENS: Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations as if its

teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. Outside, the brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows, glorious pageants began, the Lord Mayor gave orders to keep Christmas as it should be, and even the hard done by little tailor, stirred up tomorrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the baby sallied out to buy beef. A lonely homeless person even walked by and began to sing down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas Carol. But at the first sound of...

HOMELESS BOY: 'God bless you, merry Gentlemen!
May nothing you dismay!'

Scrooge slams a ruler down on his desk.

DICKENS: Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror.

SCROOGE: You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

CLERK: If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE: It's not convenient and it's not fair. If I was to stop you half a crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound? And yet, you don't think *me* ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work.

CLERK: It's only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE: A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! Be here all the *earlier* next morning.

CLERK: Thank you, sir.

DICKENS: The clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist, ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, in honour of its being

Christmas Eve. Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was dark, and the fog and the frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley, since his last mention of his seven years' dead partner that afternoon.

We hear Marley's voice calling Scrooge in the distance.

DICKENS: And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door...

Scrooge see's Marley's face on the knocker on the door.

DICKENS: Saw in the knocker – not a knocker, but Marley's face.

The face disappears.

DICKENS: To say that he was startled, would be untrue. He shut the door; and he *did* look cautiously behind it.

SCROOGE: Pooh. pooh!

Scrooge walks across the hall, and up the stairs; slowly too: trimming his candle as he goes. He enters his room, nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa, nobody in

the closet, nobody under the bed, nobody under his dressing-gown.

DICKENS: Quite satisfied, he closed his door. He took off his cravat, put on his dressing- gown and slippers, and his nightcap; and sits down before the fire to take his gruel. He stared into the fire, eating, listening...

SCROOGE: Pooh.

Marley's face swallows up the whole fireplace. Scrooge spits up some gruel.

SCROOGE: Humbug!

Scrooge leans back into his chair and closes his eyes.

A disused bell, hanging in the room, begins to swing lightly. It gets more violent.

Many bells throughout the house begin to ring. They come to a crescendo and stop at once. We hear chains and footsteps outside the bedroom door at a distance. They get closer.

They arrive right outside Scrooge's door. Silence.

The door opens. Scrooge runs to his bed, jumps in, and covers himself with the sheets. We see footsteps enter and travel towards scrooge's bed.

As they arrive at the bed, Scrooge comes out from under the covers.

SCROOGE: It's humbug still! I won't believe it.

Marley just appears. He is in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The

chain he draws is clasped around his middle. It is long and wound about him like a tail.

The chain is made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. He is transparent or illuminating.

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

MARLEY: Much!

SCROOGE: Who are you?

MARLEY: Ask me who I *was*.

SCROOGE: Who *were* you then?

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

SCROOGE: Can you – can you sit down?

MARLEY: I can.

SCROOGE: Do it, then.

MARLEY: You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE: I don't

MARLEY: Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE: Because, a little thing affects them. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an under-done potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!
Humbug.

Marley raises a frightful cry and shakes their chain with such a dismal and appalling noise.

SCROOGE: Mercy! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

MARLEY: Do you believe in me or not?

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

MARLEY: It is required of every man, that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world – oh, woe is me! – and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!

Marley raises a frightful cry and shakes their chain.

SCROOGE: You are chained. Tell me why.

MARLEY: I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you? Or would you know the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself?

SCROOGE: Jacob, speak comfort to me, Jacob!

MARLEY: I have none to give. I cannot rest. I cannot stay. I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house – mark me! – in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!

SCROOGE: Seven years dead and travelling all the time!

MARLEY: No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for

one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! Such was I!

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

MARLEY: Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed star which led the wise men to a poor home! Hear me! My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE: I will.

MARLEY: I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day. That is no light part of my penance. I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of procuring, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE: You were always a good friend to me.

MARLEY: You will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE: Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?

MARLEY: It is.

SCROOGE: I – I think I'd rather not.

MARLEY: Without their visits you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one.

SCROOGE: Couldn't I take 'em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?

MARLEY: Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!

DICKENS: The apparition walked backward from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open. It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. The spectre, after listening for a moment, became sensible of confused noises in the air...

Incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. Marley joins in the mournful dirge and floats out the window into the bleak, dark night.

Scrooge follows to the window and looks out.

We hear many ghosts and phantoms moaning and wandering in restless haste. Some familiar to Scrooge. The noise of the creature's fade...

Scrooge closes the window and runs over to shut the bedroom door. He waits a second and tries to say "Humbug" but stops himself at the first syllable. He leaps into bed, pulls the sheets up to his chin and falls asleep. Lights fade to just a little light over Scrooge in bed.

Stave 2: The First of the Three Spirits

DICKENS: When Scrooge awoke, it was dark.

Chimes of the neighbouring church bell strike from six to seven, seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stops. Scrooge listens in astonishment.

SCROOGE: Why, it isn't possible that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night.

Scrooge scrambles out of bed and over to the window. He looks out of the window. A moment of silence before the chime goes three quarters more.

He remembers the promise of a visitation... Ding, dong!

SCROOGE: A quarter past.

Ding, dong!

SCROOGE: Half past.

Ding, dong!

SCROOGE: A quarter to it. The hour itself...

Ding, dong!

SCROOGE: (*beat*) and nothing else!

Lights flash. Curtains of his bed are drawn. A light bleeds from another door into the room. We hear noises coming from this room. Scrooge slowly approaches the light and the door and enters the new room. Scrooge finds himself face to face with the unearthly visitor.

DICKENS: Scrooge found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor. It was a strange figure – like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man. It wore a tunic of the purest white, and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh

green holly in its hand and had its dress trimmed with summer flowers.

SCROOGE: Are you the spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?

FIRST SPIRIT: I am.

SCROOGE: Who, and what are you?

FIRST SPIRIT: I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE: Long past?

FIRST SPIRIT: No. Your past.

SCROOGE: What business brought you here?

FIRST SPIRIT: Your welfare and reclamation. Take heed.

The spirit reaches out its strong hands and clasps Scrooge gently by the arm.

FIRST SPIRIT: Rise, and walk with me. Bear but a touch of my hand there, and you shall be upheld in more than this.

As soon as Scrooge touches the Spirit's hand the world begins to change.

SCROOGE: Good Heaven! I was bred in this place. I was a boy here.

FIRST SPIRIT: Your lip is trembling. You recollect the way?

SCROOGE: Remember it! I could walk it blindfold.

FIRST SPIRIT: Strange to have forgotten it for so many years. Let us go on.

DICKENS: They walked along the road, every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market- town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river.

FIRST SPIRIT: These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us. The school is not quite deserted. A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.

SCROOGE: I know it.

DICKENS: They left the highroad, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables. They entered a dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. They went, the ghost and Scrooge, to a door at the back of the house. Opening, it disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, lined by desks. At one of these a lonely boy...

The Spirit touches Scrooge on the arm and points to the boy. We hear "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen" in the background.

SCROOGE: Poor boy! I wish... but it's too late now.

FIRST SPIRIT: What is the matter?

SCROOGE: Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that's all.

FIRST SPIRIT: (*smiles thoughtfully*) Let us see another Christmas.

DICKENS: The room became a little darker and more dirty. Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly

holidays. Scrooge looked at the ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.

The door opens.

FAN: Dear, dear brother! I have come to bring you home, dear brother! To bring you home, home, home!

SCROOGE: Home, little Fan?

FAN: Yes, Home, for good and all! Home, for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home's like Heaven. He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man! and are never to come back here; but first, we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world!

SCROOGE: You are quite a woman, little Fan!

Fan claps her hands, laughs, and tries to touch his head. But being too little, laughs, and stands on her tiptoes to embrace him. She drags him towards the door; and he, nothing loth to go, accompanies her. Fan disappears out the door and leaves Scrooge.

FIRST SPIRIT: Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered. But she had a large heart.

SCROOGE: So she had.

FIRST SPIRIT: She died a woman, and had, as I think, children.

SCROOGE: One child.

FIRST SPIRIT: True. Your nephew.

SCROOGE: Yes.

DICKENS: The school, having been left behind them, became the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and repassed; where shadowy carts and coaches battled for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were. The ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door.

FIRST SPIRIT: Do you know it?

SCROOGE: Know it? I was apprenticed here!

DICKENS: They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller, he might have knocked his head against the ceiling.

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

Old Fezziwig lays down his pen, and looks up at the clock, which points to the hour of seven. He rubs his hands; adjusts his capacious waistcoat; laughs all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and calls out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

FEZZIWIG: Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!

SCROOGE: Dick Wilkins, to be sure!

Enter young Scrooge with his fellow 'prentice.

SCROOGE: Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick. Dear, dear.

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

DICKENS: In they all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling, in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Miss Fezziwig, the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. Away they all went, down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping.

FEZZIWIG: Well done!

Music and Dance. Passing of Drinks and Food. Cake, Roast, Mince Pies, and plenty of Beer.

Song 'Sir Roger de Coverley'. Fezziwig and Mrs Fezziwig Dance. They shine in every part of the dance like moons. They teach the others and get them dancing.

Maybe Young Scrooge and Dick teach the others too. Scrooge relives the party. Maybe he dances with some of the guests.

The clock strikes eleven. Everyone starts to exit. Fezziwig and Mrs Fezziwig, one on either side of the door, shake hands with everyone, and wish them Merry Christmas as they exit. The last to leave are Young Scrooge and Dick. Scrooge is behind them in the line like he is reliving every moment of the memory. He remembers the Ghost and turns to them.

FIRST SPIRIT: A small matter to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.

SCROOGE: Small? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.

FIRST SPIRIT: What is the matter? SCROOGE: Nothing in particular. FIRST SPIRIT: Something I think.

SCROOGE: No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That's all.

World changes.

FIRST SPIRIT: My time grows short. Quick!

The World changes again. Apprentice Scrooge we just saw enters with A fair young girl in a mourning dress.

BELLE: It matters little. To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.

APPRENTICE SCROOGE: What idol has displaced you, Belle?

BELLE: A golden one.

APPRENTICE SCROOGE: This is the even-handed dealing of the world. There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth.

BELLE: You fear the world too much. Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so. You are changed. When it was made, you were another man.

APPRENTICE SCROOGE: Belle, I was a boy.

BELLE: That which promised happiness when we were one heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. Tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now?

APPRENTICE SCROOGE: You think not?

BELLE: I would gladly think otherwise if I could. Can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl – you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by gain: or, choosing her, if for a moment you were false enough to your one guiding principle to do so, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow. I do; and release you. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were.

She turns away from him. He is about to speak when...

BELLE: You may – the memory of what is past half makes me hope you will – have pain in this. May you be happy in the life you have chosen.

She exits.

SCROOGE: Spirit, show me no more. Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?

FIRST SPIRIT: One shadow more.

SCROOGE: No more! No more, I don't wish to see it. Show me no more.

The Ghost pinions him in both arms. Lights go to dark and the world changes. As the light comes up, we see a beautiful young girl who has magically appeared sitting near a winter fire.

DICKENS: They were in another scene and place; a room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so like Belle that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw her, now a comely matron, enter to sit opposite her daughter.

Older Belle Enters and sits.

The mother and daughter laughed heartily as the father entered with presents.

Door knocking. The young daughter runs to the door and lets her father in.

They embrace with joy. Older Belle approaches and embraces him as well. The young daughter starts putting gifts under the tree as...

HUSBAND: Belle, I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon.

BELLE: Who was it?

HUSBAND: Guess!

BELLE: How can I? Tut, don't I know. (*Laughing with him*) Mr Scrooge.

HUSBAND: Mr Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear.

SCROOGE: (*In broken voice*) Spirit, remove me from this place.

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

SCROOGE: Remove me. I cannot bear it. Leave me! Take me back! Haunt me no longer!

A glowing light becomes brighter and brighter blinding Scrooge and us.

The Spirit disappears. Exhausted and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness, Scrooge stumbles to bed and sinks into a heavy sleep.

Stave 3: The Second of the Three Spirits

A blaze of ruddy light hits Scrooge in bed, the clock, and the door.

DICKENS: Without venturing for Scrooge quite as hardly as this, I don't mind calling on you to believe that he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and rhinoceros would have astonished him very much. Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the bell struck one (*bell strikes*),

Scrooge sits up in bed.

And no shape appeared (*Scrooge trembles*).

Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came.

Scrooge lays back down. The blaze of ruddy light hitting Scrooge and the clock fades to dark.

At last, however, he began to think – as you or I would have thought at first; for it is always the person not in the predicament who knows what ought to have been done in it and would unquestionably have done it too – at last, I say, he began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room.

Scrooge sits up softly and puts on his slippers. The light on the door elevates in intensity. He shuffles to the door. He

*reaches for the door lock and as his hand touches it...
black. In the darkness we hear...*

SECOND SPIRIT: *(heard in the darkness)* Ebenezer.
Ebenezer Scrooge.

*When the lights arise, we are in Scrooge's room with the
ghost. A transformation has happened. Living green, a
grove, glistening berries, crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe,
ivy.*

*A throne of turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great
joints of meat, long wreaths of sausages, mince pies, plum
puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-
cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, and seething
steaming bowls of punch.*

*Scrooge opens the door and enters. Sitting by the throne is
a jolly giant holding a glowing torch. The giant is clothed
in a simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur.
Its feet are bare. A holly wreath, set here and there with
shining icicles, sits on its head. Girded round its middle
was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the
ancient sheath was eaten up with rust. The spirit holds up
high the glowing torch to shed its light on Scrooge.*

SECOND SPIRIT: Come in! Come in, and know me better,
man. I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look upon me.
You have never seen the like of me before?

SCROOGE: Never.

SECOND SPIRIT: Have you never walked forth with the
younger members of my family; meaning (for I am very
young) my elder brothers born in these later years?

SCROOGE: I don't think I have. I am afraid I have not.
Have you had many brothers, Spirit?

SECOND SPIRIT: More than eighteen hundred.

SCROOGE: A tremendous family to provide for.

The spirit rises.

SCROOGE: Spirit, conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. Tonight, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.

SECOND SPIRIT: Touch my robe.

DICKENS: Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast. All vanished instantly. Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game poultry, meat, sausages, oysters, pies, and punch. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning. The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in a shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content.

We hear jovial voices. Hustling and bustling crowds. Laughter. A Market. Grocers. Bakers shop.

SCROOGE: Is there a peculiar flavour in what you sprinkle from your torch?

SECOND SPIRIT: There is. My own.

SCROOGE: Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?

SECOND SPIRIT: To any kindly given. To a poor one most.

SCROOGE: Why to a poor one most?

SECOND SPIRIT: Because it needs it most.

SCROOGE: Spirit, I wonder you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment.

SECOND SPIRIT: I?

SCROOGE: You would deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all. Wouldn't you?

SECOND SPIRIT: I?

SCROOGE: You seek to close these places on seventh day. And it comes to the same thing!

SECOND SPIRIT: I seek?

SCROOGE: Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family.

SECOND SPIRIT: There are some upon this earth of yours, who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us.

SCROOGE: I will.

Mrs Cratchit enters with Belinda Cratchit. Both dressed in poorly, twice-turned gowns, brave in ribbons. Master Peter Cratchit enters plunging a fork into the saucepan of potatoes. Two smaller children come tearing in, smelling, and checking out the goose.

MRS CRATCHIT: What has ever got your precious father then? And your brother, Tiny Tim. And Martha warn't as late last Christmas Day by half an hour.

MARTHA CRATCHIT: (*entering*) Here's Martha, mother.

PETER CRATCHIT: Here's Martha, mother! There's such a goose, Martha!

MRS CRATCHIT: Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!

Mrs Cratchit kisses Martha and helps her remove her bonnet and shawl.

MARTHA CRATCHIT: We'd a deal of work to finish up last night and had to clear away this morning, mother.

MRS CRATCHIT: Well! Never mind so long as you are come. Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye.

CHILDREN: No, no. There's father coming. Hide, Martha, hide!

Martha is hid by the other children. Bob Cratchit enters with Tiny Tim on his shoulders. Bob is wearing threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable. Tim bears a little crutch and has his limbs supported by an iron frame.

BOB CRATCHIT: Why, where's our Martha?

MRS CRATCHIT: Not coming.

BOB CRATCHIT: Not coming! Not coming upon Christmas Day?

Martha runs out into Bob's arms. The two children grab Tiny Tim and carry him out.

MRS CRATCHIT: And how did little Tim behave?

BOB CRATCHIT: As good as gold and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see. He is growing strong and hearty.

Tiny Tim enters with the other children. Peter and Martha help him and lift him up to his stool by the fire. Bob turns up his ragged cuffs and helps set the table. As do the children (mashing potatoes, pouring water, pulling up chairs, etc.). As the goose is placed on the table...

CHILDREN: Hurrah!

They say grace.

BOB CRATCHIT: Never was such a goose cooked.

MRS CRATCHIT: A sufficient dinner for the whole family, indeed.

They eat.

DICKENS: There never was such a goose. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration.

Mrs Cratchit exits from the table and leaves the room.

Eked out by apple Sauce and mashed potatoes, every one had had enough.

Mrs Cratchit enters with the pudding.

BOB CRATCHIT: Oh, a wonderful pudding!

MRS CRATCHIT: I may have added too much flour.

Bob rises and kisses her affectionately. They all begin to draw around the hearth. Bob carries Tiny Tim and his stool. Bob holds him closely.

DICKENS: At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up.

BOB CRATCHIT: A merry Christmas to us all, my dears! God bless us!

MRS CRATCHIT & CHILDREN: God bless us.

TINY TIM: God bless us every one!

Bob holds Tiny Tims withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep Him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

SCROOGE: Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live.

SECOND SPIRIT: I see a vacant seat, in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by The Future, the child will die.

SCROOGE: No, no, oh, no, kind spirit! Say he will be spared.

SECOND SPIRIT: If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease

the surplus population. Man, if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered what the surplus is, and where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men 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 child. Oh God, to hear the insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust.

As Scrooge crumples to the rebuke...

BOB CRATCHIT: Mr Scrooge. I'll give you Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast.

MRS CRATCHIT: The Founder of the Feast indeed! I wish I had him here! I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it!

BOB CRATCHIT: My dear, the children! Christmas Day!

MRS CRATCHIT: It should be Christmas Day, I am sure, on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr Scrooge! You know he is, Robert. Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow.

BOB CRATCHIT: My dear, Christmas Day!

MRS CRATCHIT: I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's, not for his. Long life to him. A merry Christmas and a happy new year. He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!

BOB CRATCHIT: Well, a toast. I have a situation in my eye for Master Peter, which would bring in full five-and-sixpence weekly!

Laughter and a toast.

And to Martha, a milliner's apprentice, whose hard work and long hours are an envy to us all.

MARTHA: I mean to lie abed tomorrow for a good long rest!

More laughter. When the laughter subsides, Tiny Tim begins singing All Through the Night.

TINY TIM:

Sleep, my child, and peace attend thee, All through the night

Guardian angels God will send thee, All through the night

Soft the drowsy hours are creeping, Hill and dale in slumber sleeping

I my loved ones' watch am keeping, All through the night

Angels watching, e'er around thee, All through the night

Midnight slumber close surround thee, All through the night

The Second Spirit begins to lead Scrooge with his torch unto a bleak and desert moor as we hear Tiny Tim's song fade out and end.

Soft the drowsy hours are creeping, Hill and dale in slumber sleeping

I my loved ones' watch am keeping, All through the night.

DICKENS: Without a word of warning from the ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and nothing grew but moss and froze, and coarse rank grass.

SCROOGE: What place is this?

SECOND SPIRIT: A place where miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth. But they know me. See!

A bright light shines through a window, and swiftly they advance towards it. We hear an old Christmas song sung by many. Young and old sing.

Scrooge holds the Spirit's robe. The Spirit turns away from the window with Scrooge holding tightly to the robe.

SCROOGE: Not to Sea.

SECOND SPIRIT: To Sea!

The Christmas song starts to fade out and be taken over by the thundering of water, waves against rocks, rolling and raging, undermining the earth. Storm-birds. Darkness. Moaning wind. A hearty laugh...

During this laugh, the stage transforms and Scrooge's Nephew enters the space as the lighting shifts and the storm sounds are taken over by his laughter.

DICKENS: If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blest in laugh than Scrooge's nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me, and I'll cultivate his acquaintance. It is fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour.

Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he.

Scrooge's niece enters laughing. Preparing dessert, post-dinner, by lamplight.

And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roared out lustily.

Fred and Scrooge's Niece's party enters all laughing.

NEPHEW: He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live! He believed it too!

NIECE: More shame for him, Fred.

NEPHEW: He's a comical old fellow, that's' the truth: and not so pleasant as he might be.

However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.

NIECE: I'm sure he is very rich, Fred. At least you always tell *me* so.

NEPHEW: What of that, my dear? His wealth is of no use to him! He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking – ha, ha, ha! – that he is ever going to benefit us with it!

NIECE: I have no patience with him.

NEPHEW: Oh I have. I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner!

NIECE: Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner
(*agreement from the rest*). (*Clapping her hands*) Do go on,
Fred.

NEPHEW: I was only going to say that the consequence of
his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is,
I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could
do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions
than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his mouldy
old office, or his dusty chambers, I mean to give him the
same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I
pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't
help thinking better of it – I defy him – if he finds me going
there, in good temper, year after year, and saying Uncle
Scrooge, how are you. If it only puts him in the vein to
leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, *that's* something; and I
think I shook him yesterday. How about some tea and
music?

*Scrooge's Niece begins to sing her own rendition of O Holy
Night as they pour and pass tea.*

NIECE:

O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining, It is the
night of the dear Saviour's birth.

Long lay the world in sin and error pining. Till he
appeared and the Spirit fell its worth.

*Scrooge softens as the Spirit looks on. As the Niece
continues singing the rest of the guests set up for a game of
'Yes and No'.*

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, For yonder
breaks a new and glorious morn.

Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices! O night divine, the night when Christ was born; O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!

O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!

DICKENS: After the music, many games were played. 'How, when, and where' was a favourite and so was 'Yes and No', where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was.

SCROOGE: Here is a new game. One half hour, spirit, only one!

The party acts out the game as the narrator (Dickens) speaks.

DICKENS: The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed, elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets...

PARTY GOER 1: A horse! *(Nephew shakes his head)*

NIECE'S SISTER: An ass! *(Laughter and Nephew shakes his head)*

PARTY GOER 2: A bull! *(Nephew shakes his head)*

PARTY GOER 3: A tiger! *(Nephew shakes his head)*

PARTY GOER 4: A bear! *(Nephew laughs, shakes his head, and jumps on top of the furniture)*

NIECE'S SISTER: I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred! I know what it is!

NEPHEW: What is it?

NIECE'S SISTER: It's your Uncle Scrooge! (*Fred nods it certainly is*)

NEPHEW: He has given us plenty of merriment, I am sure, and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment; and I say, "Uncle Scrooge!"

ALL: Uncle Scrooge!

NEPHEW: A merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is! He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge.

DICKENS: Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew, and he and the spirit were again upon their travels. Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the ghost grew older, clearly older.

SCROOGE: Are spirits' lives so short?

SECOND SPIRIT: My life upon this globe is very brief. It ends tonight.

SCROOGE: Tonight!

SECOND SPIRIT: Tonight at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near. (*Chimes ringing the three quarters past eleven*)

SCROOGE: Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?

SECOND SPIRIT: It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it. Look here!

The Spirit lifts its robe to reveal two children: wretched, abject, frightful, ragged, scowling, wolfish, hideous, miserable. They cling upon its robe.

SECOND SPIRIT: Oh, Man, look here! Look, look, down here!

Scrooge starts back, appalled.

SCROOGE: Spirit, are they yours?

SECOND SPIRIT: They are Man's. And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it! (*stretches out his hand*) Slander those who tell it ye!

Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And bide the end.

SCROOGE: Have they no refuge or resource?

SECOND SPIRIT: Are there no prisons? (*turning on him*) Are there no workhouses?

The bell strikes twelve. As it rings, the Spirit, Ignorance, and Want disappear. On the last strike of the clock, a

solemn phantom, draped and hooded, like a mist along the ground, comes towards him.

Stave 4: The Last of the Spirits

DICKENS: When it came, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

Third Spirit in a deep black garment, which conceals its head, its face, its form, stretches out its hand.

SCROOGE: Am I in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas yet to Come?

The spirit changes direction with its arm and points onward with its hand.

SCROOGE: You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us. Is that so, Spirit?

Scrooge trembling can hardly stand.

SCROOGE: Ghost of the Future! I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?

The spirit points straight before them.

SCROOGE: Lead on. Lead on. The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know.

Lead on, Spirit!

DICKENS: The phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along. They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it. The spirit stopped beside one little know of business men. Observing that the hand was pointing to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk. (*city sounds*)

BUSINESS MAN 1: No, I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead.

BUSINESS MAN 2: When did he die?

BUSINESS MAN 1: Last night, I believe.

BUSINESS MAN 3: Why, what was the matter with him? (*taking out a large quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff box*) I thought he'd never die.

BUSINESS MAN 1: God knows.

BUSINESS MAN 2: What has he done with his money?

BUSINESS MAN 1: I haven't heard. Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to *me*. That's all I know.

They laugh.

It's likely to be a very cheap funeral, for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?

BUSINESS MAN 2: I don't mind going if lunch is provided, but I must be fed! (*laughs*)

BUSINESS MAN 1: Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all, for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But Ill offer to go, if anybody else will.

When I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure that I wasn't his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye-bye.

DICKENS: The phantom glided on with its fingers pointing to two persons meeting.

Scrooge knew these men. They were men of business: very wealthy, and of great importance.

WEALTHY MAN 1: How are you?

WEALTHY MAN 2: How are you?

WEALTHY MAN 1: Well. Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?

WEALTHY MAN 2: So I am told. Cold, isn't it? Seasonable for Christmas time. You're not a skater, I suppose?

WEALTHY MAN 1: No. No. Something else to think of. Good-morning!

DICKENS: Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognized its situation; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly.

Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the stragglng streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery. Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a lowbrowed, beetling shop, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds.

Old Joe sits there with a pipe. Lit only by a scanty light from Old Joe's lamp. A woman (#1) with a heavy bundle enters.

Mrs Dilber enters closely followed by a man in faded black.

The woman with the bundle throws it on the floor and sits down on a stool.

OLD JOE: Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour.

WOMAN 1: What odds then? What odds, Mrs Dilber? Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did.

MRS DILBER: That's true, indeed. No man more so.

WOMAN 1: Why then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who's the wiser?

We're not going to pick holes in each other's coats, I suppose!

MRS DILBER: No indeed (*laughs with the man*)

WOMAN 1: If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, a wicked old screw, why wasn't he natural in his lifetime?

If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.

MRS DILBER: It's the truest word that ever was spoke.
It's a judgement on him!

WOMAN 1: I wish it was a little heavier judgement, and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I'm not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it! We know pretty well that we were helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe.

The man in faded black produces his plunder (a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, a brooch). Old Joe appraises them.

OLD JOE: That's your account and I wouldn't give another sixpence, if I was to be boiled for not doing it. Who's next?

Mrs Dilber produces hers (sheets and towels, apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, sugar tongs, a few boots).

OLD JOE: I always give too much to ladies. It's a weakness of mine, and that's the way I ruin myself. That's your account. If you asked me for another penny, and made it an open question, I'd repent of being so liberal and knock off half a crown.

WOMAN 1: And now undo *my* bundle, Joe.

OLD JOE: What do you call this? Bed-curtains?

WOMAN 1: Ah! Bed-curtains!

OLD JOE: You don't mean to say you took them down, rings and all, with him lying there?

WOMAN 1: Yes I do, why not?

OLD JOE: You were born to make your fortune and you'll certainly do it!

WOMAN 1: I certainly shan't hold my hand, when I can get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as he was, I promise you, Joe. Don't drop that oil upon the blankets, now.

OLD JOE: His blankets?

WOMAN 1: Whose else's do you think? He isn't likely to take cold without them, I dare say.

OLD JOE: I hope he didn't die of anything catching! Eh?

WOMAN 1: Don't you be afraid of that. I an't so fond of his company that I'd loiter about him for such things, if he did. Ah! You may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted it, if it hadn't been for me.

OLD JOE: What do you call wasting of it?

WOMAN 1: Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure (*laughs*). Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If calico an't good enough for such a purpose, it isn't good enough for anything. It's quite as becoming to the body. He can't look uglier than he did in that one.

Old Joe produces a flannel money bag and lays out their gains upon the ground.

WOMAN 1: Ha, ha! This is the end of it, you see. He frightened everyone away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!

SCROOGE: Spirit, I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now.

A bed appears beside Scrooge, on which, beneath a ragged sheet, lay something covered up. A pale light falls straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man. Dark, empty.

Cat scratches tearing at a door. Sounds of gnawing rats. A room of death.

Merciful heaven, what is this?

The Spirit points towards the head of the body.

SCROOGE: Spirit, this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go.

The Spirit points towards the head of the body.

SCROOGE: I understand you and I would do it, if I could. But I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power.

The Spirit turns towards him.

SCROOGE: If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man's death, show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you.

The Phantom spreads its dark robe, like a wing; and withdrawing it, reveals a room by daylight, where a mother (Caroline) is. She looks out the window.

Looks at the clock. Expecting someone. A knock on the door. She hurries to the door, and meets her husband. He sits down. Long silence.

CAROLINE: Is it good news, or bad?

HUSBAND: Bad.

CAROLINE: We are quite ruined!

HUSBAND: No. There is hope yet, Caroline.

CAROLINE: If he relents, there is. Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened!

HUSBAND: He is past relenting. He is dead. What the woman whom I told you of last night, said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay; and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me; turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying, then.

CAROLINE: To whom will our debt be transferred?

HUSBAND: I don't know. But before that time, we shall be ready with the money; and even though we were not, it would be a bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep tonight with light hearts, Caroline.

SCROOGE: Let me see some tenderness connected with a death, or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, will be for ever present to me.

Lights shift slowly. Mrs Cratchit enters followed by Martha and Peter. We are immediately in the Cratchit home. Peter has a book. They sit close to a candle. Mrs Cratchit and Martha sew.

PETER: (*reading*) And he took a child and set him in the midst of them.

MRS CRATCHIT: (*putting down her work*) The colour hurts my eyes. The colour! Ah, poor Tiny Tim. They're better now again. It makes them weak by candlelight; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world.

PETER: Past it rather (*shuts his book*). But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother.

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

PETER: And so have I. Often.

MARTHA: And so have I. But he was very light to carry and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble: no trouble. And there is father at the door.

Mrs Cratchit gets up and readies some tea for him. Bob Cratchit wrapped in a blanket enters. Peter and Martha greet him and embrace him. Mrs Cratchit brings him tea.

BOB CRATCHIT: You are so good to me. Thank you. You have all done such a magnificent job preparing everything for Sunday.

MRS CRATCHIT: Sunday! You went today, then, Robert?

BOB: Yes, my dear. I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child! My little child!

Mrs Cratchit takes him over and sits him down.

BOB: I ran into Mr Scrooge's nephew in the street today. He is extraordinarily kind. He looked very down when I saw him. When I inquired what had happened to distress him, he said, for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, "I am heartily sorry for it, Mr Cratchit. And heartily sorry for your good wife.

Heartily sorry, for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way," he said, giving me his card, "that's where I live. Pray come to me." Now, it wasn't for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us.

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

BOB: You would be surer of it, my dear, if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn't be at all surprised – mark what I say – if he got Peter a better situation.

MRS CRATCHIT: Only hear that, Peter.

MARTHA: And then Peter will be keeping company with someone and setting up for himself.

PETER: (*grinning*) Get along with you.

BOB: It's just as likely as not. One of these days; though there's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim – shall we – or this first parting that there was among us.

PETER AND MARTHA: Never father!

BOB: And I know, I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was little, little child; we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it.

PETER: Never.

MARTHA: Never father.

BOB: I am very happy. I am very happy.

They all embrace.

SCROOGE: Spectre, something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead.

The Spirit raises his arm and points in a different direction. Lights shift.

SCROOGE: It's my office. The furniture is different. Who is that in my chair?

The Spirit raises his arm and points in a different direction. Lights shift.

DICKENS: Scrooge joined the Spirit, and wondering why and whither he had gone, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. A churchyard.

SCROOGE: Is it here, then, where the wretched man whose name I have yet to learn, lay underneath the ground? A worthy place.

DICKENS: The Spirit stood among the graves and pointed down to one. The phantom was exactly as it had been, but Scrooge dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

SCROOGE: Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point, answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?

The Spirit does not move, continuing to point at the stone.

Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!

The Spirit does not move and continues pointing. Scrooge creeps towards it, following the finger, trembling. Written on the stone:

EBENEZER SCROOGE

SCROOGE: Am I that wretched man who lay upon the bed?

The Spirit turns his hand from the grave and points at Scrooge. He points back to the grave.

SCROOGE: No, Spirit. Oh no, no! (*clutching at the Spirit's robe*) Spirit, hear me! I am not the man I was! I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse! Why show me this, if I am past all hope?

The Spirit's hand begins to shake for the first time. Scrooge falls on his knees before it.

SCROOGE: Good Spirit! Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!

The Spirit's kind hand trembles more.

SCROOGE: I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the past, the present, and the future. The spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!

He grabs the Spirit's hand. The Spirit seeks to free itself, but Scrooge is strong in his entreaty and detains it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulses him. Scrooge holds up his hands in a last prayer as the Spirit, shrinks, collapses, and dwindles down into a bedpost.

Stave 5: The End of It

DICKENS: The bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the time before him was his own, to make amends in.

SCROOGE: I will live in the past, the present, and the future! The Spirits of all three shall strive within me. Oh, Jacob Marley, Heaven, and the Christmastime be praised for this. I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees. My bed-curtains. They are not torn down! They are not torn down, rings and all. They are here – I am here – the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be! I know they will. I don't know what to do! I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy! I am as giddy as a drunken man! A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Whoop!

Hallo! There's the saucepan that the gruel was in. There's the door, by which the ghost of Jacob Marley entered. There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present sat. It's all right, it's all true, it all happened! Ha, ha, ha! I don't know what day of the month it is. I don't know how long I've been among the spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby! Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby! Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!

Church bells hammering, clanging, and clashing.

Oh, glorious, glorious!

He runs over to the window and opens it. Bells still ringing.

Oh, glorious, Glorious! Boy, hey boy! What's today?

THE BOY: Eh?

SCROOGE: What's today, my fine fellow?

THE BOY: Today? Why, Christmas Day!

SCROOGE: (*to himself*) It's Christmas Day! I haven't missed it! The spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!

THE BOY: Hallo!

SCROOGE: Do you know the poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner?

THE BOY: I should hope I did!

SCROOGE: An intelligent boy! A remarkable boy. Do you know whether they've sold the prize turkey that was hanging up there – Not the little prize turkey: the big one?

THE BOY: What, the one as big as me?

SCROOGE: What a delightful boy! It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!

THE BOY: It's hanging there now.

SCROOGE: Is it! Go and buy it!

THE BOY: Huh?

SCROOGE: No, no, I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell them to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes and I'll give you half a crown!

THE BOY: Woo Hoo!

SCROOGE: What a delightful boy. I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's. He shan't know who sent it.

It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!

DICKENS: He dressed himself all in his best and chuckled at the thought of this huge turkey. SCROOGE: Why, it will be impossible to carry it to Camden Town. I must have a cab. Hallo!

Whoop!

Many Christmas citizens cross the stage.

DICKENS: And at last Scrooge got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded everyone with a delightful smile.

PERSON: Good morning, sir.

SCROOGE: A merry Christmas to you!

DICKENS: He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld one of the chuggers, who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, *'Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge, or Mr Marley?'* It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

SCROOGE: My dear sir (*quickenning his pace and taking the gentleman by both his hands*). I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir.

1st CHUGGER: Mr Scrooge?

SCROOGE: Yes, That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness –

Scrooge whispers in their ear.

1st CHUGGER: Lord bless me! My dear Mr Scrooge, are you serious?

SCROOGE: If you please. Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?

1st CHUGGER: My dear sir (*shaking his hand*). I don't know what to say to such munificence.

SCROOGE: Don't say anything, please. Come and see me. Will you come and see me?

1st CHUGGER: I will!

SCROOGE: Thank you. I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!

DICKENS: He had never dreamed that any walk – that anything – could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew's house. He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it:

A young girl answers the door.

SCROOGE: Is my nephew at home, my dear?

GIRL: Yes, sir.

SCROOGE: Where is he, my love?

GIRL: He's in the dining-room, sir, along with your niece. I'll show you, if you please.

SCROOGE: Thank you.

They walk in to see a dinner table. A spread.

SCROOGE: Fred.

NIECE: Dear heart alive.

FRED: Why bless my soul! Who's that?

SCROOGE: It's I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?

Fred embraces his uncle.

DICKENS: It was a mercy Fred didn't shake his arms off! He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did the sister when she came. So did everyone when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness. But he was early at the office next morning.

The scene begins to transition to goodbyes and Scrooge entering his office.

Taking off his jacket, spreading papers to make himself look busy, looking at the clock.

DICKENS: Oh, he was early there. If he could only be there first and catch Bob Cratchit coming late. That was the thing he had set his heart upon. And he did it; yes, he did. The clock struck nine (*strike*). No Bob. A quarter past (*strike*). No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time.

Bob Cratchit hurries in with his comforter. He throws his hat and sits on his stool In a jiffy. He starts working away to make up time. Scrooge sits seeing all of this.

SCROOGE: Hallo! What do you mean by coming here at this time of the day?

BOB: I am very sorry, sir. I *am* behind my time.

SCROOGE: You are. Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please.

BOB: It's only once a year, sir. (*getting up*) It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir.

SCROOGE: Now, I'll tell you what, my friend. I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore, (*leaping from his stool*) and therefore I am about to raise your salary. A merry Christmas, Bob (*claps him on the back*). A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of punch, Bob. Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit.

DICKENS: Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him. He had no further intercourse with spirits, but lived upon the total abstinence principle, ever afterwards, and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, every one!

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About the Author

Lee Wilson is an award-winning actor, director, producer, professor, writer, and is training with Patsy Rodenburg as a presence, speech, and text coach. He is an avid Toronto Maple Leaf's and Manchester United fan, having a former life as an athlete and fancying himself as a young George Best. His other passions include coaching actors, executives, and politicians and writing songs on his guitar in his spare time. His greatest two loves are his dog Fiona and the Emerald Isle, and he has many other adaptations and eBooks beginning to spark. He received his BFA in acting at Toronto Metropolitan University and his MFA in directing at The Lir, Dublin, Ireland. He holds a British, Canadian, and Irish passport. You can follow his work at

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