

A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens

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Scene 1

Sound: Church clock striking three times.

Chorus (young voices): They sing a chorus of “God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen.” At its climax:

Sound: Door opens.

Scrooge (barks): Stop it! Stop it, I say! (Singing stops) Get away from here. We’ll have no singing around here. Understand me! No singing!

Boy: A merry Christmas, sir.

Scrooge: Get away, I say.

Second Boy: No need to wish ‘im a Merry Christmas. That’s old Scrooge.

Music: A contemporary Christmas ballad. Forte and fade under.

Narrator: Yes, that is Old Scrooge... Ebenezer Scrooge. It is the afternoon before Christmas Day in the year of our Lord 1844. Despite the bitterly cold weather, all of London is in a festive mood. But there is no happy expression on Ebenezer Scrooge’s lined face as he closes the front door of his warehouse and returns to his office. (Music out. He throws a glowering look at his clerk, Bob Cratchit. Satisfied that the poor wretch is hard at work, Scrooge adjusts his spectacles. Then without warning...)

Sound: Door (away) opens.

Fred: A Merry Christmas, Uncle. God save you!

Scrooge: Bah! Humbug!

Fred: Christmas a humbug? Surely, you don’t mean that, Uncle.

Scrooge: Merry Christmas, indeed! What right have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.

Fred: What right have you to be dismal? You’re rich enough.

Scrooge: What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer. If I had my way, every idiot who goes about with “Merry Christmas” on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. You keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

Fred: I came here to ask you to spend Christmas Day with Peg and me.

Scrooge (flatly): No!

Fred: But we want nothing from you, Uncle, other than your company. (Pause) Won’t you change your mind and have dinner with us?

Scrooge: Good afternoon, Fred.

Fred: A Merry Christmas.

Scrooge: Good afternoon.

Fred: And a Happy New Year.

Scrooge: Bah! Humbug!

Music: A brief bridge, up and out.

Cratchit: Er, pardon me, Mr. Scrooge, but there is a gentleman here to see you.

Scrooge: What about, Cratchit?

Cratchit: He didn’t say, sir.

Gentleman: Ah, good afternoon, sir. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or

Mr. Marley?

Scrooge: Mr. Marley, my former partner, has been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago this very night.

Gentleman: Then I have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.

Scrooge: What do you want?

Gentleman: At this festive season, Mr. Scrooge, we try and make some slight provision for the poor and destitute. Many thousands are in want of common necessities.

Scrooge: Are there no prisons?

Gentleman: Oh, plenty of prisons.

Scrooge: And the workhouses, are they still in operation?

Gentleman: I wish I could say they were not. How much shall I put you down for, Mr. Scrooge?

Scrooge: Nothing!

Gentleman (puzzled): Nothing!

Scrooge: Exactly! Let these deserving people of yours go to the establishments I have mentioned.

Gentleman: Most of them would rather die than do that.

Scrooge: Then let them do that and help decrease the surplus population. I'm busy. Good afternoon to you.

Gentleman (quietly): Very good, Mr. Scrooge. Merry Christmas to you.

Sound: Door (off) open and close.

Scrooge (grumbles): Charity! Pah! Humbug!

Cratchit: Er, Mr. Scrooge, sir.

Scrooge: Well, what is it, Cratchit?

Cratchit: I was wondering—

Scrooge: You were wondering if you could go home.

Cratchit: Yes, sir. It's getting late.

Scrooge: Yes, go on. You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

Cratchit: If quite convenient, sir.

Scrooge: It's not convenient, and it's not fair.

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

Scrooge: A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth day of December. I suppose you must have the whole day. But be here all the earlier the next. Understand?

Cratchit: Yes, sir. And Merry Christmas.

Scrooge: Christmas! Humbug!

Music: A Christmas theme, up and under.

Scene 2

Narrator: A few minutes later Scrooge leaves his warehouse and makes his way to his melancholy chambers, a gloomy suite of rooms. By the light of a single flickering candle, he eats his cold supper. And then to save lighting his stove, Ebenezer Scrooge retires for the night. (Music out) The minutes tick away. Scrooge sleeps uneasily, tossing from side to side.

Sound: Chains being dragged across the floor.

Narrator: Suddenly he awakes with a start. Walking toward him, and dragging a heavy chain, is a gray, dim figure of a man. It stops at the foot of the bed.

Scrooge (frightened): Who are you? What do you want with me? (Pause) Who are you?

Marley: Ask me who I was.

Scrooge: You're... You're...

Marley: Yes, in life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

Scrooge: But it cannot be so. You're dead.

Marley: You don't believe me.

Scrooge: No. You're nothing but an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese.

Marley: You are wrong, Ebenezer. I am the ghost of Jacob Marley.

Scrooge: Why do you 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.

Scrooge: No, no, I don't believe it.

Marley: It is then doomed to wander through the world.

Scrooge: You are chained, Jacob. Tell me why.

Marley: I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard. I wore it of my own free will. Is its pattern strange to you?

Scrooge (trembling): I don't understand.

Marley: This chain I wear is as heavy as the one you are now forging.

Scrooge: You talk strangely, Jacob.

Marley: For seven years I have been dead—traveling the whole time. No rest, no peace. Only remorse.

Scrooge: But you were always shrewd, Jacob.

Marley: Aye, too shrewd.

Scrooge: A good man of business.

Marley: Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. But I heeded none of these. I thought only of money.

Scrooge: And what is wrong with making money?

Marley: That is your fault, Ebenezer, as it was mine. That is why I am here tonight. That is part of my penance. I am here to warn you... to help you escape my fate. You

have one chance left.

Scrooge: Tell me how this chance will come!

Marley: My time draws near. I must go. Tonight you will be haunted by three spirits. The first will appear when the bell strikes one; expect the second at the stroke of two, and the third as the bell tolls three.

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

Marley: No. And heed them when they appear. (Fading) Remember, it is your last chance to escape my miserable fate.

Music: A bit ominous. Forte and fade out under Narrator.

Scene 3

Narrator: As Scrooge stares in frightened silence, the wraithlike figure of his deceased partner dissolves into space. Then, exhausted by the ordeal, Scrooge drops off to sleep. Twelve o'clock comes. Time passes. Then:

Sound: Off in the distance, steeple clock strikes once.

Narrator: The curtains of Scrooge's bed are drawn aside, but by no visible hand. There by the bed stands an unearthly visitor... a strange figure—like a child. Its hair is white, and in its hand it holds a sprig of fresh green holly. Scrooge stares and then speaks.

Scrooge: Are you the spirit whose coming was told me by Jacob Marley?

First Ghost (a gentle voice): I am.

Scrooge: Who and what are you?

First Ghost: I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

Scrooge: Long past?

First Ghost: No. Your Past. Rise and walk with me.

Scrooge: Where?

First Ghost: Out through the window.

Scrooge: But we are three stories above ground. I am only a mortal.

First Ghost: Bear but a touch of my hand upon your heart, and you shall be upheld in more than this.

Scrooge: What are we to do?

First Ghost: I am going to help reclaim you. Come! Walk with me out into the night... into the past.

Sound: Wind. It sweeps in; hold and then fade out.

Scrooge: Tell me, Ghost of Christmas Past, where are we?

First Ghost: Look down, Ebenezer, and remember back.

Scrooge (amazed): Why... why, of course. The river... the meadows... and—why, there's my old school. I went there as a lad. But there is no one about.

First Ghost: It is Christmas holiday. Let us look into this study hall.

Scrooge: Empty, except for a young boy sitting at a desk, his head in his hands. Left behind. He... he's crying. Poor chap! No place to go at Christmas. Ah, now he's looking up.

First Ghost: Do you recognize him?

Scrooge (stunned): Why, it's—

First Ghost: What is his name?

Scrooge (slowly): Ebenezer Scrooge. (Pause) I wish—But it's too late now.

First Ghost: What is the matter?

Scrooge: Nothing, nothing. There were some boys singing Christmas carols outside my warehouse door yesterday afternoon. I drove them away.

First Ghost: Let us see another Christmas.

Sound: Wind up, briefly and out.

First Ghost: It is a year later... another Christmas.

Scrooge: And again there is the school.

First Ghost: That boy standing in the driveway, pacing up and down.

Scrooge: It is I.

First Ghost: And what do you see?

Scrooge: A coach coming up the driveway. Now it has stopped, and a little girl gets out. Look, she is hugging me. It's Fan, my sister.

First Ghost: Listen to what she says.

Fan: I've come to bring you home, dear brother. Father's not mean any more, and he says you're never coming back here, and from now on we'll always be together. (Fading) Just think, together for the first time in four years.

First Ghost: Your sister was a delicate creature... kind... big-hearted.

Scrooge: So she was, so she was. She died comparatively young.

First Ghost: She left one child behind her.

Scrooge: Yes. Fred, my nephew.

First Ghost (mildly): He was in to wish you a Merry Christmas yesterday.

Scrooge: Yes. Yes, he did so. Please take me back.

First Ghost: Not yet. There is one more shadow.

Scrooge: No more. I do not wish to see it.

First Ghost: You must.

Sound: The wind sweeps in full again, then out.

First Ghost: The years have passed. In this house below. Look, there sits a young girl, a beautiful girl.

Scrooge: It's Belle.

First Ghost: The girl you were to marry. And there you sit next to her, a young man in your prime. Only now your face begins to show the signs of avarice. There is a greedy, restless motion in your eyes. Listen to what she is saying to you.

Belle (she is about 18): It matters very little to you. Another idol has displaced me, a golden one. You hold money more important than me or anything else, for that matter. And I'm going to grant your wish: free you from marrying me. (Fading) That is the way you wish it, Ebenezer. I feel sorry for you.

Scrooge: Spirit, show me no more.

First Ghost: Today, Belle is a happy woman, surrounded with her fine children. Those children might have been yours if you hadn't been so selfish.

Scrooge: Take me back. Haunt me no more! I beg of you, don't!

Music: Ethereal theme. Forte and fade under for narrator.

Scene 4

Narrator: The steeple clock has just finished striking the second hour of Christmas Day. Scrooge finds himself back in his bedroom. Slowly his door, though bolted, swings open.

Music: Out.

Second Ghost (a big, booming voice): Good morning, Ebenezer. Welcome me. I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look upon me.

Scrooge: You're practically a giant. Yet you have a young face.

Second Ghost: Have you never seen the like of me before?

Scrooge: Never.

Second Ghost: I have many brothers, over eighteen hundred of them, one for each Christmas since the very first.

Scrooge: And you are here to take me with you?

Second Ghost: Yes. I trust you will profit by your journey. Touch my robe, Ebenezer.

Sound: Wind. Up full and out into:

Chorus (mixed voices): Singing a chorus of a Christmas hymn. As they near conclusion, fade them under for:

Scrooge: Those people in this church, they seem very happy.

Second Ghost: They are, for they are giving thanks for all the joys brought to them during the year.

Scrooge: And the crew of that ship over there... Look, they are shaking hands with the captain.

Chorus: Out.

Second Ghost: Wishing him a Merry Christmas. But come! We have not much time left, and there is still another place we must visit. It is a very poor house in a very poor section of London. This one directly below us.

Scrooge: Indeed it is. Who, may I ask, lives here?

Second Ghost: An underpaid clerk named Bob Cratchit.

Scrooge: The Bob Cratchit who is employed by me?

Second Ghost: The very same.

Scrooge: That woman... those four children.

Second Ghost: His wife and family.

Scrooge: Coming up the stairs right now. That's Cratchit. He's carrying a young boy.

Second Ghost: His fifth child... Tiny Tim.

Scrooge: He carries a crutch.

Second Ghost: Because he is crippled.

Scrooge: But the doctors—

Second Ghost: Cratchit cannot afford a doctor, not on fifteen shillings a week.

Scrooge: But—

Second Ghost: Sshhh! Listen.

Sound: Door opens.

Cratchit (heartily): Good afternoon, everyone.

Tim: And a most Merry Christmas.

Mrs. Cratchit: Father... Tiny Tim.

The Other Cratchits (they ad lib):

Tom: "Merry Christmas,"

Dick: "Welcome,"

Martha: "Tiny Tim, sit next to me,"

Peter: "Father, let me take your muffler."

Mrs. Cratchit: And how did Tiny Tim behave at Church?

Cratchit: As good as gold, and better.

Tim: I was glad to be able to go to church. That's because I wanted the people to see that I'm a cripple.

Mrs. Cratchit: Now that's a peculiar thing to say, Tiny Tim.

Tim (eagerly): No, it isn't. That's because I was in God's House, and it was God who made the blind able to see and the lame able to walk. And when the people at church saw me and my crutch, I was hoping they would think of what God can do, and that they would say a prayer for me.

Mrs. Cratchit: I... I'm certain they must have prayed for you.

Tim: And one of these days I'm going to get well, and that'll mean I can throw away this crutch, and run and play like the other boys.

Cratchit (softly): You will, Tim—one of these days. (Heartily) And now, Mother, the big question. When will dinner be ready?

Sound: Ad libs from the children.

Mrs. Cratchit: It's ready right now: just about the finest goose you have ever seen. Martha, you carry it in. Tom, you fetch the potatoes and turnips. Dick, Peter, set the chairs around the table.

Tim: And I'll sit between Father and Mother.

Cratchit: This is going to be the best Christmas dinner anyone could hope for.

(Fading) And I'm the luckiest man in the world, having such a fine family.

Scrooge: It isn't a very big goose, is it? I could eat the whole bird myself, I believe.

Second Ghost: It is all Bob Cratchit can afford. His family doesn't complain. To them, that meager goose is a sumptuous banquet. And more important, much more important, Ebenezer...

Scrooge: Go on.

Second Ghost: They are a happy and united group. Look at their shining faces. Listen to them.

Sound: The Cratchits adlibbing in happy fashion.

Cratchit: What a superb dinner we have had... the tempting meat, the delicious dressing.

Tim: And the plum pudding, Father. Don't forget that.

Cratchit: That pudding was the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since her marriage.

Sound: The children laugh.

Mrs. Cratchit: Thank you for the compliment. I must confess it was good.

Cratchit: And now for the crowning touch. The punch!

Sounds (ad libs of): "The punch!" "Good!" "Oh!"

Cratchit: Here we are. Get your glasses. You, Peter... Dick... Tom... Martha... Tiny Tim... and last, but far from least you, Mother. And not to forget myself. (With finality) There!

Tim: A toast!

Cratchit: First the founder of this feast, the man who has made it possible. I give you Mr. Scrooge.

Mrs. Cratchit (bristling): Mr. Scrooge,

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.

Cratchit (warningly): My dear, the children! Christmas Day.

Mrs. Cratchit: He's a hard, stingy, unfeeling man. You know he is, Robert, better than anybody else.

Cratchit (mildly): My dear. Remember, Christmas Day.

Mrs. Cratchit: I'm sorry. Very well, I'll drink his health. Long life to him! A Merry Christmas to him! To Mr. Scrooge.

Family (chorusing): To Mr. Scrooge!

Cratchit: And now a toast to us: A Merry Christmas to us all. God bless us!

Family: God bless us.

Tim: God bless us every one.

Music: "Noel"—Forte and fade under.

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

Second Ghost: I see a vacant seat in the 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 live, that he will be spared.

Second Ghost: Why concern yourself about him? Isn't it better that he die and decrease the surplus population?

Scrooge: But these poor people must be helped.

Second Ghost: Are there no prisons? And the workhouses, are they still in operation?

Scrooge: Do not taunt me.

Second Ghost: It is time for us to go.

Scrooge: No, I wish to remain.

Second Ghost: I can remain no longer. Touch my robe, and we shall go.

Scrooge: No. No, I say! Spirit, don't desert

me. I need your help.

Music: Up briefly and under.

Scene 5

Narrator: As Ebenezer Scrooge comes to his senses, he discovers himself standing on the street, outside of his lodgings. A heavy snow is falling, blanketing a sleeping London. The wind has died down. It is still early Christmas morning.

Music: Out into:

Sound: Steeple bell off in distance striking three times.

Third Ghost (warningly): Ebenezer... Ebenezer Scrooge.

Scrooge: You are the third and last.

Third Ghost: I am the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.

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?

Third Ghost: Yes, Ebenezer, that is correct.

Scrooge: I tremble at going with you. I fear what I am to see.

Third Ghost: Come, Ebenezer.

Sound: Wind up full and out.

Scrooge: Why do we stop here on this street corner, Spirit?

Third Ghost: Those two men standing there, do you know them?

Scrooge: Why, yes, I do business with them.

Third Ghost: Their conversation is interesting.

Man 1: When did he die?

Man 2: Last night, I believe.

Man 1: I thought he'd never die.

Man 2: What has he done with his money?

Man 1: I haven't heard. Left it to his company, perhaps. Well, one thing is certain, he didn't leave it to charity.

Man 2: Are you going to his funeral?

Man 1: Not unless a free lunch is provided.

Man 2: A very good point. Can't say that I blame you.

Scrooge: Spirit, this dead man they were discussing, who is he?

Third Ghost: I will show you.

Sound: Wind up briefly and out.

Scrooge: This room, it's too dark to see.

Third Ghost: In front of you is a bed. On it lies a man—the body of the man those men on the street were discussing.

Scrooge: And no one has come to claim this body?

Third Ghost: No one, for he left not a friend behind him. Come closer and look into his face.

Scrooge: No.

Third Ghost: Look!

Scrooge: This is a fearful place. Let us go.

Third Ghost: Look at the face of this unclaimed man.

Scrooge: I would do it if I could. But I haven't the power. Let me see some tenderness connected with a death. If I don't, that lonely body in this dark room will ever haunt me.

Third Ghost: Yes, I know of such a home, one where there is tenderness connected with death. Over here on this poor street and in this dismal house.

Scrooge: But this house—Why, yes, I've been here before. Bob Cratchit, my clerk lives here. There is Mrs. Cratchit and her eldest daughter, Martha.

Martha: Your eyes, Mother, you'll strain them working in this bad light.

Mrs. Cratchit: I'll stop for a while. I

wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home. It's time he was here.

Martha: Past it, rather. But these days he walks slower than he used to, Mother.

Mrs. Cratchit: I have known him to walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder very fast, indeed. He was very light to carry; and your father loved him so, it was no trouble.

Sound: Door handle.

Mrs. Cratchit: There is your father now at the door.

Sound: Door opens and shuts.

Mrs. Cratchit: You're late tonight, Robert.

Cratchit: Yes, I'm late.

Martha: I'll get some tea for you, Father.

Cratchit: Thank you, Martha.

Mrs. Cratchit: You went there today, Robert?

Cratchit: Yes, I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is.

Mrs. Cratchit: I'll see it soon.

Cratchit: I promised him I would walk there every Sunday. My poor Tiny Tim. At last he got rid of his crutch.

Mrs. Cratchit (fading): Yes, at last he did. Our poor Tiny Tim.

Scrooge: Tell me, Spirit, why did Tiny Tim have to die?

Third Ghost: Come, there is still another place to visit.

Sound: Wind. Up and out.

Scrooge: A graveyard. Why do we pause here?

Third Ghost: That tombstone... read the name on it.

Scrooge: Before I do, answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the

things that *will* be, or are they the shadows of the things that *may* be, only?

Third Ghost: The inscription on the tombstone.

Scrooge: It reads... (slowly) "Ebenezer Scrooge." No, Spirit. Oh, no, no! Hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this lesson. I will honor Christmas in my heart.

Third Ghost: But will you?

Scrooge: Oh, yes. I will try and keep it alive all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. I will not shut out the lesson that all three Spirits have taught me. Oh, tell me there is hope, that I may sponge away the writing on this stone.

Sound: Wind up strong. Hold and out into: Joyous church bells, tolling Christmas Day. Hold under.

Scene 6

Scrooge (moans as though coming out of a dream): Tell me there is hope, that I may sponge away the writing on this stone. (Coming to) Eh, what am I holding on to? The bedpost. I am in my own bed... home. Those bells! It must be Christmas Day. Christmas Day—I wonder if it really is. We shall see. Open the window.

Sound: Window being raised.

Scrooge: You, boy, down there.

Boy (away): Eh?

Scrooge: What day is today, my fine lad?

Boy: Today! Why, Christmas Day, of course.

Scrooge: And to think the Spirits have done it all in one night.

Boy: What did you say sir?

Scrooge: Do you know the poulterer's in the next street?

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 in the window?

Boy: The one as big as me?

Scrooge: What a delightful boy! Yes, the one as big as you.

Boy: It's hanging there now.

Scrooge: Go and buy it. I am in earnest. Here is the money. Catch. (Pause) Deliver it to Bob Cratchit, who lives on Golden Street in Camden Town.

Boy: But sir, there will be considerable change left over.

Scrooge (chuckling): Keep it, my boy. Keep it.

Boy (delighted): Oh, thank you, sir.

Scrooge: And, boy.

Boy: Yes, sir.

Scrooge: Don't let Mr. Cratchit know who sent the turkey. It's something of a surprise. And something else.

Boy: Yes, sir.

Scrooge: A very Merry Christmas to you.

Music: A Christmas hymn. Up and under.

Scene 7

Sound: Knock on door. Repeated. Door opens.

Fred: What is it? (Pause) Why, bless my soul!

Scrooge (heartily): Yes, yes, it is I—your Uncle Scrooge. I've come for dinner. Now let me in. I have a present for your good wife. From now on I'm going to be one of your most persistent guests. I've changed, my boy: you'll see!

Music: Up and under for Narrator.

Narrator: Scrooge was better than his word. He did everything he promised, and

infinitely more. He became a persistent visitor to his nephew's home, and even took Fred into business with him. He raised Bob Cratchit's salary to a figure that left that bewildered gentleman gasping; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He provided doctors for the little lad, and very soon Tiny Tim will have his wish: he will be able to throw away his crutch and run and play like the other boys. As for the three Spirits, Ebenezer Scrooge never saw them again. That was due to the unchallengeable fact that Scrooge, for the rest of his days, helped keep alive the spirit of Christmas. And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us every one.

Music: Up full to close.