

# A Christmas Carol

INT. THE STUDY - NIGHT

Huge gold lettering on the binding of a book. Quite unexpectedly, it reads:

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Beside it on a shelf are other books: OLIVER TWIST, DAVID COPPERFIELD, and, of course, A CHRISTMAS CAROL. A small hand reaches for this last and pulls it off the shelf. A sober-faced, young GIRL, maybe ten years old, clutches the book to her bosom and intently carries it out of the room and into:

INT. THE SITTING-ROOM

A cheerily-lit sitting-room in London, England, one Christmas Eve in the 1860s. The girl carries the book to a corner of the room where a man sits before a large picture window revealing a snow covered street under a night sky. Handsome, in his late twenties, with a pleasant voice, obviously a favorite uncle -- he is surrounded by a noisy circle of children and young adults. He is to be the NARRATOR of the story. They are pestering him for something and he is waving them off.

NARRATOR

I don't know why you should want to hear this story again. You must have heard it a dozen times by now.

THE SKEPTICAL ADOLESCENT

A hundred.

THE ADOLESCENT WHO  
WISHED HE WAS AN ADULT

A thousand. But it's good for a laugh.

THE SKEPTICAL ADOLESCENT

And it's your story as much as it is anyone's. Isn't it?

NARRATOR

(genuine modesty)

Maybe it is. But I'm not sure I'm necessarily the right one to tell it.

THE SKEPTICAL ADOLESCENT

Aw, that's not true. Grandmother says you're the only one who knows how to tell it right.

The others, particularly the younger children, murmur agreement. The ten year old girl presses through the little crowd with the book in her hand.

THE TEN YEAR OLD GIRL

Please. We want to hear it from you.

She hands the Narrator the book. He smiles at it and sets it in his lap unopened as the ten year old girl sits at his feet. Slowly, some of the others begin to sit down too.

NARRATOR

(off the book)

Oh, now, you know, I don't really need this.

The Narrator, staring at the book, is suddenly lost in thought and talks as much to himself as to the others.

NARRATOR

I've been telling this story every Christmas now for oh, I don't know how many years. Since I was a boy. And I know it by heart. It always begins the same way.

A pause.

THE TEN YEAR OLD GIRL

(very quietly)

How does it begin?

The Narrator abruptly looks up. Everyone is now seated. They stare at him expectantly. And without any warning, he begins.

NARRATOR

Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail. This must be distinctly understood or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. So, remember, Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail. The registrar of his burial was signed by Ebenezer Scrooge. And Scrooge's name was good on the London Exchange for anything he chose to put his hand to.

As he speaks, the view of the street through the window behind him blurs and resolves itself into a view of the London Exchange.

INT. THE LONDON EXCHANGE - DAY

Late afternoon on Christmas Eve, in the year 1843. The Exchange is packed with well-dressed businessmen who hurry up and down, and chink the money in their pockets, and converse in groups, and look at their watches, and trifle thoughtfully with their great gold seals; and so forth. Among their number is a FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN who chats with a RED-FACED MAN WITH A PENDULOUS EXCRESCENCE. Also present is a man with a sharp and bitter face -- and as bald as Patrick Stewart, give or take a hair. This is EBENEZER SCROOGE. Scrooge is bundling up his coat and heading for the exit when the fat man makes eye contact with him.

FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN

Ah, Mister Scrooge...

SCROOGE

Your servant, sir.

FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN  
Are you off home to keep Christmas?

SCROOGE  
I am not in the habit of keeping Christmas,  
sir.

RED-FACED MAN WITH A  
PENDULOUS EXCRESCENCE  
Then why are you leaving so early?

SCROOGE  
Christmas has a habit of keeping men from  
doing business.

RED-FACED MAN WITH A  
PENDULOUS EXCRESCENCE  
Come, it's in the nature of things that ants  
toil and grasshoppers sing and play, Mister  
Scrooge.

SCROOGE  
An ant is what it is and a grasshopper is what  
it is and Christmas, sir, is a humbug. Good  
day.

The two men laugh at Scrooge as he exits the Exchange.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE LONDON EXCHANGE

Moments later, on the massive stone steps just outside the Exchange, a shivering, POORLY-DRESSED MAN sees Scrooge walking toward him. Scrooge pays him no heed and walks past. The man follows and clutches at Scrooge's sleeve. The two men descend the steps together.

POORLY-DRESSED MAN  
Mister Scrooge, sir.

SCROOGE  
Who are you?

POORLY-DRESSED MAN  
Samuel Wilson, sir.

SCROOGE  
Oh, yes. You owe me a little matter of  
twenty-odd pounds, I believe. Well, if you  
want to pay it, come to my place of business.  
I don't conduct my affairs in the teeth of  
inclement weather.

POORLY-DRESSED MAN  
I-I can't pay you, sir.

SCROOGE

I'm not surprised.

POORLY-DRESSED MAN

Not unless you give me more time.

SCROOGE

Did I ask you for more time to lend you the money?

POORLY-DRESSED MAN

Oh, no, sir.

SCROOGE

Then why should you ask for more time to pay it back?

POORLY-DRESSED MAN

I can't take my wife to a debtors' prison.

SCROOGE

Then leave her behind. Why should she go to a debtors' prison anyway? She didn't borrow the twenty pounds. You did. What has your wife got to do with it? For that matter, what have I got to do with it? Good afternoon.

Scrooge tries to walk off but the man clutches at his sleeve.

POORLY-DRESSED MAN

But, Mister Scrooge. It's Christmas!

Scrooge shakes the man off.

SCROOGE

Christmas has even less to do with it, my dear sir, than your wife has or I have. You'd still owe me twenty pounds that you're not in the position to repay if it was the middle of a heat wave on August Bank holiday. Good afternoon.

Scrooge stalks away as the stunned man stands and stares at him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A LONDON STREET

Outside Scrooge's counting-house. Cold, bleak, biting weather. People in the street go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks strike three, but it's quite dark already. Candles flare in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog comes pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and is so dense that although the street is narrow, the houses opposite are mere

phantoms. The sign above the counting-house door reads:

SCROOGE & MARLEY

A tall man -- whom we will come to know as Scrooge's nephew, FRED -- rapidly walks up to the door, opens it, and enters.

INT. COUNTING-HOUSE

Scrooge's clerk, BOB CRATCHIT, sits in a dismal little cell, a sort of tank, copying letters. There's a very small fire, so small that it looks like there's only one lump of coal. The clerk puts on his white comforter, trying -- and failing -- to warm himself at the candle. Fred appears, all in a glow; his face ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkle, and his breath smokes in the cold. He grins at Bob Cratchit who raises an eyebrow, surprised to see him. Fred crosses to the doorway of an adjacent office in which someone sits, hunched over a desk, busily writing.

FRED

A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

The person at the desk spins around, glaring at the intruder. It's Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

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.

FRED

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

Scrooge has no better answer ready.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug.

FRED

Don't be cross, uncle.

Fred enters the office and crosses to a gothic window in the wall from which is visible the ancient tower of a church.

SCROOGE

What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas. 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; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you?

(beat)

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. He should!

FRED

Uncle!

SCROOGE

Nephew!

(beat)

Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

FRED

Keep it! But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE

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

FRED

(casually)

There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say. Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round -- apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that -- as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women 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. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!

Bob Cratchit, still in the tank, involuntarily applauds. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he quickly pokes the fire, and extinguishes the last frail spark.

SCROOGE

(to Bob Cratchit)

Let me hear another sound from you and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your job.

(to his nephew)

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

FRED

Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow.

(a long pause)

Will you come see us?

SCROOGE

Oh, I'll see you all right... I'll see you in hell.

FRED

(astonished)

But why? Why?

SCROOGE

Why did you get married?

FRED

(confused)

Because I fell in love.

Scrooge looks at him as if falling in love was the only thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas.

SCROOGE

Because you fell in love! Good afternoon!

FRED

Uncle, you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

FRED

I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why can't we be friends?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

FRED

I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. 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.

FRED

And a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

Fred leaves the room with a wry grin. On his way out the front door and buttoning his coat, he exchanges greetings with Bob Cratchit.

FRED

How is Mrs Cratchit and all the small, assorted Cratchits?

BOB CRATCHIT

Very good, sir.

FRED

All champing at the bit waiting for Christmas to begin, eh?

BOB CRATCHIT

Oh, yes, sir. All very eager.

FRED

And the little lame boy. Which one is he? Tim?

BOB CRATCHIT

Tim, sir.

FRED

That's right. How is he?

BOB CRATCHIT

We're in high hopes he's getting better, sir.

FRED

Good. A merry Christmas to you.

BOB CRATCHIT

Same to you, sir, I'm sure.

FRED

Thank you.

Bob Cratchit watches Fred exit, then glances at Scrooge's office, surprised to find Scrooge glaring at him.

SCROOGE

And you! Fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam.

Bob Cratchit watches Scrooge shake his head and return to his desk.

INT. COUNTING-HOUSE

Not long after, TWO PORTLY GENTLEMEN, pleasant to behold, stand, with their hats off, in Scrooge's office. They hold books and papers in their hands, and bow to him. The 1st Gentleman glances at a list.

1ST GENTLEMAN  
Scrooge and Marley's, I believe.  
(cheerfully)  
Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr  
Scrooge, or Mr Marley?

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

The two gentlemen exchange glances while Scrooge grins malevolently at them. The first gentleman hands his credentials to Scrooge.

1ST GENTLEMAN  
(to Scrooge)  
We have no doubt his liberality is well  
represented by his surviving partner.

At the ominous word "liberality", Scrooge frowns, shakes his head, and hands the credentials back. The 2nd Gentleman takes pen in hand.

2ND GENTLEMAN  
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. Many thousands are in  
want of common necessities; hundreds of  
thousands are in want of common comforts,  
sir.

SCROOGE  
Are there no prisons?

The gentleman lays down his pen.

2ND GENTLEMAN  
Plenty of prisons.

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

1ST GENTLEMAN  
They are. Still. I wish I could say they  
were not.

SCROOGE  
The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full

vigour, then?

1ST GENTLEMAN

Both very busy, 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.

1ST GENTLEMAN

Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are attempting to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE

Nothing!

1ST GENTLEMAN

You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE

I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned: they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there.

1ST GENTLEMAN

Many can't go there; and many 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 GENTLEMAN

But you might know it.

SCROOGE

It's not my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!

Scrooge returns to his paperwork as the gentlemen exchange astonished looks.

EXT. STREETS OF LONDON - NIGHT

The fog and darkness have thickened. People run about with flaring torches, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. At the corner, some labourers repair gas-pipes, and have lighted a great fire in an iron basket, round which a party of ragged men and boys gather: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings have sullenly congealed, and turned into misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackle in the lamp-heat of the windows, make pale faces ruddy as they pass. A lean woman emerges from the butchers' with a package of meat.

EXT. COUNTING-HOUSE

A small BOY nervously approaches Scrooge's window to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of "God bless you, merry gentleman! May nothing you dismay!" Scrooge seizes a ruler with such energy of action that the singer flees in terror.

INT. COUNTING-HOUSE

The moment the boy has fled, Scrooge's threatening countenance relaxes and he grins, rather pleased with himself.

Scrooge glances at the church tower, nearly invisible in the fog, as its clock STRIKES the hour, with tremulous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head. Time to shut up the counting-house. With an ill-will, Scrooge dismounts from his stool, and nods to Bob Cratchit, who instantly snuffs his candle out, and puts on his hat.

SCROOGE

You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

BOB CRATCHIT

If quite convenient, Sir.

SCROOGE

It's not convenient, and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound?

Bob Cratchit smiles faintly.

SCROOGE

And yet, you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work.

BOB CRATCHIT

It's only once a year, Mr Scrooge.

SCROOGE

A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December,

Scrooge buttons his great-coat to the chin.

SCROOGE

But I suppose you must have the whole day.  
Be here all the earlier next morning!

BOB CRATCHIT

I will. I promise.

Scrooge walks out into the street with a growl. Bob Cratchit closes the office in a twinkling.

EXT. LONDON STREET

A coatless, shivering Bob Cratchit locks the front door and rushes off with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist.

INT. TAVERN

Scrooge eats a melancholy dinner in a melancholy tavern; the newspapers he has just read lie in a stack on his table; he studies his banker's-book.

EXT. SCROOGE'S BUILDING

A dark and threatening building. Nobody lives in it but Scrooge, the other rooms are all let out as offices. The yard is so dark that Scrooge gropes with his hands through the fog and frost to the black old doorway of the house on which is a fairly large knocker. Scrooge puts his key in the lock of the door and glances at the knocker. Without its undergoing any intermediate process of change, the knocker is no longer a knocker, but Marley's face. Scrooge gasps.

SCROOGE

(whispers)

Marley?

Marley's face. Not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the yard are, but with a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. Not angry or ferocious, the face looks at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up upon its ghostly forehead; the hair curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot-air; eyes wide open but perfectly motionless. That, and its livid colour, make it horrible; but its horror seems to be in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression. As Scrooge lets go of the key and stares fixedly at this phenomenon, it becomes a knocker again. Startled, Scrooge puts his hand upon the key, turns it sturdily, walks in, and lights his candle.

INT. ENTRY HALL

Scrooge pauses to look cautiously behind the door, as if he half expects to see Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there's nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that hold the knocker on. Scrooge closes the door with a bang. The sound echoes through the house like thunder. He fastens the door, walks across the hall, and up the stairs, slowly, trimming his candle as he goes.

INT. THE STAIRS

A grand old flight of stairs, very wide, very dark. Scrooge peers up into the darkness and, for a moment, he thinks he sees a something that looks like

a hearse going on before him in the gloom. He pauses, blinks, shakes his head, then continues, muttering to himself.

INT. SCROOGE'S ROOMS - MONTAGE

A suspicious, slightly unnerved Scrooge walks through his gloomy suite of rooms -- sitting-room, lumber-room, bed-room -- to be sure that everything's all right. In the sitting-room, he finds nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and a little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge has a cold in his head) upon the hob. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Bed-room as usual. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet. Suddenly, he sees a ghostly white shape in the darkness on the opposite side of the room.

Scrooge tenses up for a moment until he realizes it's only his dressing-gown, hung up in a suspicious attitude against the wall.

Quite satisfied, he closes his door, and locks himself in; in fact, he double-locks himself in, not his custom. Secured against surprise, he returns to the bed-room, takes off his cravat and starts to put on his dressing-gown, slippers, and night-cap.

INT. SCROOGE'S SITTING-ROOM

Having changed clothes, Scrooge sits down before the fire to take his gruel.

It's a very low fire and Scrooge sits close to it. The fireplace is an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. Cains and Abels, Pharaoh's daughters, Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, Apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures. Scrooge takes a mouthful of gruel and glances at the fireplace. FLASH CUT of every tile adorned with Marley's face as it was on the door-knocker. Scrooge blinks -- and sees that the tiles have returned to normal.

Scrooge rises and paces the room, feeling unsettled. After several turns, and more than a few nervous glances at the fireplace, he sits down again. As he throws his head back in the chair, his glance happens to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hangs in the room. As he looks, the bell begins to swing. It swings so softly at the outset that it scarcely makes a sound; but soon it rings out loudly, and for the next twenty seconds, so does every bell in the house. Throughout, an uneasy look slowly crosses Scrooge's face.

All at once, the bells cease. Scrooge relaxes, but only for a moment: a clanking noise comes from deep down below, as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar. The sound of a downstairs door flying open with a booming sound, and then the clanking noise much louder, on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door. Scrooge starts talking to himself.

SCROOGE

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

The colour leaves Scrooge's face though, when, without a pause, the source of the noise comes on through the heavy door, and passes into the room before

Scrooge's very eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaps up in the fire-place and falls again.

The same face: the very same. JACOB MARLEY'S GHOST 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. A wrapper, a folded kerchief is bound about Marley's head and chin. A long chain is clasped about his middle, wound about him like a tail; and made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. Marley's body is transparent so that Scrooge, observing him closely, can look through his waistcoat and see the two buttons on his coat behind. Scrooge feels the need to crack a joke to keep down his terror.

SCROOGE

(softly)

I'd often heard it said that you had no heart, Marley, but I never believed it until now.

Scrooge stares into the ghost's death-cold eyes and reverts to his cold and caustic self.

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

(doubtfully)

Can you -- can you sit down?

MARLEY

I can.

SCROOGE

Do it, then.

Marley sits down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it. Scrooge stares at the ghost's fixed, glazed eyes as it sits perfectly motionless though its hair, and skirts, and tassels, still quiver as if by the hot vapour from an oven.

MARLEY

You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE

I don't.

MARLEY

What evidence would you have of my reality  
beyond that of your senses?

SCROOGE

I don't know.

MARLEY

Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE

Because a little thing affects them. A  
slight disorder of the stomach makes them  
cheat. You may be an undigested bit of beef,  
a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a  
fragment of an underdone potato. There's  
more of gravy than of grave about you,  
whatever you are! You see this toothpick?

Scrooge holds up a toothpick. The ghost's eyes do not move.

MARLEY

I do.

SCROOGE

You are not looking at it.

MARLEY

But I see it, notwithstanding.

SCROOGE

Well! I have but to swallow this, and be for  
the rest of my days persecuted by a legion  
of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug,  
I tell you; humbug!

At this, the spirit raises a frightful cry, and shakes its chain with such a  
dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge holds on tight to his chair, to save  
himself from falling in a swoon. Marley starts taking off the bandage round  
its head, as if it were too warm to wear in-doors. When Marley's lower jaw  
drops down to his breast, Scrooge falls on his knees, and clasps his hands  
before his face.

SCROOGE

Mercy! Dreadful apparition, why do you  
trouble me?

MARLEY

Man of the worldly mind! 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!

Again Marley raises a cry, and shakes his chain, and wrings his shadowy hands.

SCROOGE

You are fettered. 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?

Scrooge trembles more and more.

MARLEY

Or would you know the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!

Scrooge glances about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he sees nothing.

SCROOGE

Jacob. Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob.

MARLEY

I have none to give. It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more, is all permitted to me. 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

You must have been very slow about it,

Jacob.

MARLEY

Slow!

SCROOGE

Seven years dead. And travelling all the time?

MARLEY

The whole time. No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse.

SCROOGE

You travel fast?

MARLEY

On the wings of the wind.

SCROOGE

You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years.

Marley screams another cry, and clanks his chain hideously.

MARLEY

Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed! Not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunities 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. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!

Marley holds up his chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all his unavailing grief, and flings it heavily to the floor again.

MARLEY

At this time of the year, I suffer most.

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 abode?  
Were there no poor homes to which its light  
would have conducted me!

Scrooge shivers.

MARLEY

Hear me! My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE

I will. But don't be hard upon me! Don't  
be flowery, Jacob!

MARLEY

How it is that I appear before you in a  
shape that you can see, I may not tell.  
I have sat invisible beside you many and  
many a day.

Scrooge shivers at this, and wipes the perspiration from his brow.

MARLEY

That is no light part of my penance. I am  
here to-night to warn you, that you have yet  
a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A  
chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE

You were always a good friend to me.  
Thank'ee!

MARLEY

You will be haunted ... by Three Spirits.

Scrooge's jaw drops almost as low as Marley's had done.

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  
to-morrow, 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.

Scrooge ventures to raise his eyes again, and finds his supernatural visitor confronting him in an erect attitude, with its chain wound over and about its arm. Marley takes his wrapper and wraps it round its head, as before. Scrooge winces at the clicking sound Marley's teeth make, when his jaws are brought together by the bandage. Marley walks backward from him; and with every step, the nearby window raises itself a little, so that when the ghost reaches it, it's wide open. He beckons Scrooge to approach, which he does. When they get within two paces of each other, Marley holds up his hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stops, not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear: for on the raising of the hand, he becomes sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. Marley, after listening for a moment, joins in the mournful dirge; and floats out the window into the bleak, dark night. Scrooge follows to the window: desperate in his curiosity. He looks out.

EXT. SCROOGE'S BUILDING

The foggy air is filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they go. Every one of them wears chains like Marley's; some few (they might be guilty governments) are linked together; none are free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. One old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, cries piteously at being unable to assist a WRETCHED WOMAN with an infant, whom it sees below, upon a neighboring door-step. The misery with them all is, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and have lost the power for ever. Whether these creatures fade into the mist, or the mist enshrouds them, is unclear. But they and their spirit voices fade together; and the night becomes as it had been when Scrooge walked home.

INT. SCROOGE'S SITTING-ROOM

Scrooge closes the window, and examines the door by which the Ghost had entered. It's still double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands -- the bolts are undisturbed. He tries to say "Humbug!" but stops at the first syllable.

INT. SCROOGE'S BED-ROOM

Scrooge closes his bed-room door and crosses to his bed. Without undressing, he gets in, and falls asleep instantly. The light from the fire in the sitting-room is visible under the closed bed-room door.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SCROOGE'S BED-ROOM

Scrooge awakes in darkness, some time later. The fire has gone out in the sitting-room. As the chimes of a neighbouring church strike twelve, Scrooge counts with his fingers.

SCROOGE

Twelve? It was past two when I went to bed.

Scrooge scrambles out of bed, and gropes his way to the window. He rubs the frost off with the sleeve of his dressing-gown but all he can make out is that it's very foggy and very quiet.

SCROOGE

Hmmph! Clock must be wrong. Icicle must have got into the works.

Scrooge lights a candle and sits on the edge of his bed, looking at his bedside alarm clock. It reads twelve.

SCROOGE

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

He picks up the clock and checks it, then seems to remember something.

NARRATOR

(voice over)

Now, of course, the Ghost had warned Mr Scrooge that a spirit would visit him when the bell tolled one ...

Scrooge appears to make a decision of some kind and begins to fiddle with his clock.

NARRATOR

(voice over)

... So he resolved to lie awake until the hour was past; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest decision he could make. Naturally, he didn't want to be caught dozing off, so he made sure to set the alarm on his clock to go off precisely at one.

Scrooge sets the alarm, draws open all the bed-curtains so he may keep a sharp look-out on the room, and sits up in bed -- waiting for his visitor.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SCROOGE'S BED-ROOM

About an hour later. Scrooge, warily sitting up in bed, watches the clock tick to one. The tinny alarm bell goes off. Scrooge looks around the room. Nothing.

SCROOGE

Bah!

He sighs -- whether in relief or disappointment or embarrassment, it's hard to tell -- blows out the candle, glances at the door where, the fire having gone out, no light shines through from the sitting-room. Scrooge draws all the bed-curtains shut, curls up under the covers, and with a peaceful, satisfied look on his face, shuts his eyes.

A long pause.

The church bell sounds with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Scrooge's eyes pop open and a wave of dread passes over his face. A wickedly bright light flashes up in the room, and the curtains of Scrooge's bed are instantly drawn aside. Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, finds himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them:

It's a weird, impressive figure -- like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gives him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hangs about its neck and down its back, is white as if with age; and yet the face has not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom is on the skin. The arms are very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, are, like those upper members, bare. It wears a tunic of the purest white. Round its waist is bound a lustrous belt, with a beautiful sheen. It holds a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, has its dress trimmed with summer flowers. From the crown of its head there springs a bright clear jet of light, by which all this is visible; and which is doubtless why it uses, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now holds under its arm.

Its belt sparkles and glitters now in one part and now in another. And it is continuously morphing: what is light one instant, at another time is dark, so the figure itself fluctuates in its distinctness -- being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body -- of which dissolving parts, no outline is visible in the dense gloom wherein they melt away and then re-form, distinct and clear as ever.

SCROOGE

Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?

THE GHOST

I am!

The voice is soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside Scrooge, it's at a distance.

SCROOGE

Who, and what are you?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE

Long past?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

No. Your past.

Scrooge winces and blinks at the light coming from the Ghost's crown.

SCROOGE

I wonder if you might, er, put a hat on.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

What! Would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!

SCROOGE

I didn't mean to offend. Er, what business brings you here?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Your welfare!

SCROOGE

Well, I'm much obliged, but I wonder if a good night's sleep wouldn't be more conducive to that end.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Your reclamation, then. Take heed!

The Ghost puts out its strong hand as it speaks, and clasps him gently by the arm.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Rise! and walk with me!

Scrooge rises, but finding that the Ghost leads him toward the window, clasps his robe in supplication.

SCROOGE

It's the middle of the night; it's below freezing; I'm wearing slippers, a dressing-gown, and a nightcap; I'm mortal. And I'm liable to fall.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Bear but a touch of my hand there ...

The Ghost points to its heart.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

... and you shall be upheld in more than this!

Scrooge touches the Ghost's heart and they pass through the wall.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Scrooge and the Ghost stand on an open, sunlit country road, with fields on either hand. It's a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground. Scrooge looks about and clasps his hands together.

SCROOGE

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

The Ghost gazes upon him mildly.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

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

SCROOGE

(an unusual catching in his voice)

It's a pimple.

(beat)

I beg you, Spirit, lead me where you would.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

You recollect the way?

SCROOGE

Remember it! I could walk it blindfold.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Strange to have forgotten it for so many years! Let us go on.

They walk along the road; Scrooge points out every gate, and post, and tree; A little market-town appears in the distance, with a bridge, a church, and a winding river. Some shaggy ponies, with boys upon their backs, trot down the road towards Scrooge and the Ghost. The boys call to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All are in great spirits, and shout to each other.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

(to Scrooge)

These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us.

The jocund travellers approach; and as they pass by, Scrooge's cold eye glistens. He hears them wish each other Merry Christmas, as they part at cross-roads and bye-ways, for their several homes.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

The school is not quite deserted. A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.

SCROOGE

(grim again)  
I know it.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE

Scrooge and the Ghost leave the high-road and approach a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It's a large house, but one of broken fortunes; for the spacious offices are little used, their walls are damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls cluck and strut in the stables; and the coach-houses and sheds are over-run with grass. The Ghost and Scrooge cross to a door at the back of the house. It opens before them, and discloses:

INT. SCHOOLROOM

A long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these, a lonely boy reads near a feeble fire; Scrooge sits down upon a form, and weeps to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be. The Ghost joins him.

SCROOGE  
Poor boy!

Scrooge dries his eyes with his cuff, then mutters, puts his hand in his pocket, and looks about him.

SCROOGE  
I wish ... but it's too late now.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST  
What is the matter?

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

The Ghost smiles thoughtfully, and waves its hand.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST  
Let us see another Christmas!

Scrooge's younger self suddenly morphs into an older boy, and the room becomes a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrink, the windows crack; fragments of plaster fall out of the ceiling; But his former self is still alone: all the other boys have gone home again for the holidays.

Young Scrooge is not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looks at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glances anxiously towards the door. It opens; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, stands at the threshold, looking in. It's Scrooge's sister FAN. The elder Scrooge is amazed to see her.

SCROOGE  
(whispers)

Fan...

FAN

Ebenezer.

Fan steps toward him, arms outstretched as if to give him a hug and he responds. But as she darts forward, her body passes through his -- for she is but a shadow -- and puts her arms about the neck of the younger Scrooge, and kisses him. Though disappointed, the elder Scrooge turns to watch the youngsters embrace.

FAN

Dear, dear brother. I have come to bring  
you home, dear brother!

She claps her tiny hands, and bends down to laugh.

FAN

(sings)  
To bring you home, home, home!

YOUNG SCROOGE

(stunned)  
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!

YOUNG SCROOGE

For you, perhaps. But not for me. He  
doesn't know me or even what I look like.  
Same as I hardly know you, now that you're  
quite a woman.

FAN

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.

YOUNG SCROOGE

You are quite a woman, little Fan!

She claps her hands and laughs, and tries to touch his head; but being too little, laughs again, and stands on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she begins to drag him, in her childish eagerness, towards the door; and he, nothing loth to go, accompanies her.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE

Young Scrooge's trunk is tied on to the top of a coach, not long after. Young

Scrooge and Fan bid an old schoolmaster good-bye, get in, and drive gaily down the country road: the quick wheels dash the hoar-frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens like spray.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD

The Elder Scrooge and the Ghost stand at the road-side and watch the coach go by, its two passengers laughing and talking.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST  
Always a delicate creature, whom a breath  
might have withered. But she had a large  
heart!

SCROOGE  
So she had.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST  
She died a woman. And had, as I think,  
children.

SCROOGE  
One child.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST  
True. Your nephew!

Scrooge seems uneasy in his mind.

SCROOGE  
(briefly)  
Yes.

The Ghost casually peers over Scrooge shoulder and when Scrooge turns 'round to follow his gaze, he is startled to see:

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A busy thoroughfare of a city, where shadowy pedestrians pass and shadowy carts and coaches battle for the way. The dressing of the shops shows that here too it's Christmas time again; but it's evening, and the streets are lighted up. Scrooge and the Ghost stand near a warehouse door to which the Ghost points.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST  
Know it?

SCROOGE  
Know it! I apprenticed here!

The Ghost, using a half dozen arms that fade in and out of view, gestures "After you" and Scrooge enters.

INT. WAREHOUSE

At sight of an old GENTLEMEN in a Welch wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he were two inches taller he would knock his head against the

ceiling, Scrooge lets out a gasp and turns to the Ghost behind him.

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, and calls out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice.

FEZZIWIG

Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!

Immediately, EBENEZER -- Scrooge's younger self, now a grown man -- comes briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-'prentice, DICK.

SCROOGE

(to the Ghost)

Dick Wilkins, to be sure! 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 to-night.  
Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer!  
Let's have the shutters up...  
(claps his hands, sharply)  
... before a man can say, Jack Robinson!

Dick and Ebenezer charge into the street with the shutters -- one, two, three -- have them up in their places -- four, five, six -- bar 'em and pin 'em -- seven, eight, nine -- and come back before the count of twelve, panting like race-horses. Fezziwig skips down from the high desk, with wonderful agility.

FEZZIWIG

Hilli-ho! Clear away, my lads, and let's  
have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick!  
Chirrup, Ebenezer!

FEZZIWIG CHRISTMAS MONTAGE

In a minute, Dick and Ebenezer have every movable packed off, the floor swept and watered, the lamps trimmed, fuel heaped on the fire; and the warehouse is as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room.

A fiddler with a music-book enters, goes up to the lofty desk, tunes his instrument and starts to play. MRS. FEZZIWIG, one vast substantial smile, enters. Three MISS FEZZIWIGS, beaming and lovable, enter. Six young followers whose hearts they broke, enter. All the young men and women employed in the business enter, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling -- twenty couple at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; as the dance ends, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands, crying out, "Well done!" The fiddler buries his

face in a pot of porter and then pops up again, refreshed, to keep playing.

Throughout, Scrooge and the Ghost watch. Or, rather, the Ghost watches and Scrooge lives and re-lives every moment. He points out the guests to the Ghost and talks about them animatedly, though we can't hear him over all the noise. Eventually, he ditches the Ghost like a bad blind date and follows his younger self 'round the room, listening in on conversations and laughing along with various jokes.

More dancing. Also eating: cake, negus, a great piece of Cold Roast, a great piece of Cold Boiled, mince-pies, and plenty of beer. The fiddler strikes up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Old Fezziwig dances with Mrs. Fezziwig -- an impressive display: advance and retire, hold hands with your partner, bow and curtsey; corkscrew; thread-the-needle, and back again to your place. Young Ebenezer, too, dances up a storm as his elder self looks on in amazement.

The clock strikes eleven as the party winds down. Mr and Mrs Fezziwig take their stations, one on either side of the door, and shake hands with every person individually as he or she goes out, wishes him or her a Merry Christmas. When everyone has gone but the two 'prentices, they do the same to them; Suddenly, all is very quiet as the young men are left to clean up.

Scrooge remembers the Ghost, and becomes conscious that it's looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burns very clear.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

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

SCROOGE

Small!

The Spirit signs to him to listen to the two apprentices. We overhear a snatch of the conversation as they tidy the room.

DICK

What a sweet old man is Mr Fezziwig!

EBENEZER

The sweetest! Didja see him dancin' with the Missus -- and the look on his face?

DICK

Oh, yes!

EBENEZER

He was in Heaven -- and fully deserved to be.

DICK

And where the devil did he find that fiddler?

EBENEZER

Oh, wasn't he marvelous? Nothing's too good for Fezziwig. I'd say this year's party was finer than the last -- if such a thing is possible.

As the boys head into another room, the Ghost turns to Scrooge.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Fezziwig spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?

SCROOGE

It isn't that. It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.

The Ghost raises an eyebrow at this, and Scrooge stops.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

What is the matter?

SCROOGE

Nothing particular.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Something, I think?

SCROOGE

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

Suddenly, the room darkens as young Ebenezer re-enters and turns down the lamps.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

My time grows short.

The room continues to darken until the scene fades to black.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

The black hole of a freshly dug grave -- on a frosty green cemetery lawn under a sunny blue sky. Nearby is Ebenezer, older now, a man in the prime of life, but without the harsh and rigid lines of later years: merely a few signs of care and avarice. An eager, greedy, restless motion afflicts his eye. He sits on a bench under a shady tree watching a fair young girl in a mourning-dress placing flowers by a tombstone -- her tears sparkle in the light that shines out of the Ghost of Christmas Past, who stands on the opposite side of the 'stone. An astonished Scrooge stands beside the Ghost, staring at her, his face just inches from hers.

SCROOGE

(whispers)

Belle ...

He reaches out to touch her, but she abruptly turns and crosses to his younger self, going from sunshine to shade. BELLE joins Ebenezer on the bench and takes up what appears to be an ongoing conversation.

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.

EBENEZER

What Idol has displaced you?

BELLE

A golden one.

EBENEZER

(tries to be reasonable)

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. All your  
other hopes have merged into the hope of  
being beyond the chance of its sordid  
reproach. I have seen your nobler  
aspirations fall off one by one, until  
the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you.  
Have I not?

EBENEZER

What then? Even if I have grown so much  
wiser, what then? I am not changed towards  
you.

Belle shakes her head.

EBENEZER

Am I?

BELLE

Our engagement is an old one. It was made  
when we were both poor and content to be  
so, until, in good season, we could improve  
our worldly fortune by our patient industry.  
You are changed. When it was made, you were  
another man.

EBENEZER

(impatiently)

I was a boy. 'Tis true, I am not now what I  
was then.

BELLE

I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I have thought of it, and can release you from our engagement.

EBENEZER

Have I ever sought release?

BELLE

In words? No. Never.

EBENEZER

In what, then?

BELLE

In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another Hope as its great end. In everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us, tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!

He seems to yield to the justice of this supposition, in spite of himself.

EBENEZER

You think not.

BELLE

I would gladly think otherwise if I could, Heaven knows! When I have learned a Truth like this, I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, 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 I release you from our engagement. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were.

A pause. He is about to speak; but with her head turned from him, she resumes.

BELLE

You may -- the memory of what is past half makes me hope you will -- have pain in this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it, gladly, as an

unprofitable dream, from which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!

Abruptly, she rises and leaves him.

SCROOGE

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

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

One shadow more!

SCROOGE

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

But the relentless Ghost pinions his arms, and turns him 'round to observe:

INT. BELLE'S SITTING-ROOM - NIGHT

A room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort and Christmas decorations. All is quiet. Falling snow is visible out the windows. Near the fireplace, sits a beautiful young girl, nearly identical to Belle. Belle herself, now a comely matron, is also by the fire -- sitting opposite her daughter. Scrooge gazes upon them in awe, particularly the daughter.

NARRATOR

(voice over)

I suspect it must have staggered Mr Scrooge to see these women, especially the younger one, because had he played his cards differently, a woman such as she might well have called him father, and been like a spring-time for him in the haggard winter of his life.

(beat)

Of course, he might well have had more than one child ...

Nearly a dozen children explode into the room, making a tumultuous noise, but no one seems to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laugh heartily, and enjoy it very much; and the latter mingles with them and gets clobbered ruthlessly. They stream around a startled Scrooge, running, jumping and playing with enormous energy.

NARRATOR

(voice over)

... Oh, what would I not have given to be one of those children! Though I never could have been so rude, no, no! I wouldn't for the wealth of all the world have behaved so wildly, God bless my soul!

Upon a knocking at the door, the children stampede immediately, and the daughter is borne towards it in the centre of the flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet their father, who comes home laden with

Christmas toys and presents. Shouting and struggling, the kids swarm their father, BELLE'S HUSBAND: scaling him, with chairs for ladders, to dive into his pockets, despoil him of brown-paper parcels, hold on tight by his cravat, hug him round the neck, pummel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! They shout with wonder and delight at each package they receive. Belle has risen from her chair to watch the proceedings and happens to stand next to Scrooge who watches her and her family closely, no doubt pondering what might have been.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BELLE'S SITTING-ROOM

Later that evening. Gift-wrapping litters the floor. The children have gone to bed and all is quiet again. Scrooge and the Ghost look on as Belle's husband, having his eldest daughter leaning fondly on him, sits down with her and her mother at the fireside; The husband turns to his wife with a smile.

BELLE'S HUSBAND

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

BELLE

Who was it?

BELLE'S HUSBAND

Guess!

BELLE

How can I? Tut, don't I know. Ebenezer Scrooge.

BELLE'S HUSBAND

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

Scrooge, sitting beside the Ghost on the far side of the room, shuts his eyes and shakes his head.

SCROOGE

Spirit! Remove me from this place.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

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!

Scrooge turns upon the Ghost, and sees that it looks at him with an oddly morphing face, in which there momentarily appear fragments of all the faces it has shown him: his younger selves, Fan, the Fezziwigs, Dick Wilkins,

Belle, etc. Terrified, Scrooge physically attacks the Ghost.

SCROOGE

Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!

The Ghost offers no visible resistance of its own but remains undisturbed by Scrooge's attack, the light from its head burns high and bright; Scrooge seizes the extinguisher-cap from under its arm and presses it down upon the Ghost's head. The Ghost seems to shrink beneath it, so that the extinguisher covers its whole form; but though Scrooge presses it down with all his force, he can't hide the light, which streams from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground. In a last great effort, he throws the whole of his body atop the cap and the light goes out. Blackness.

INT. SCROOGE'S BED-ROOM

The room is dark -- no light shines under the bed-room door from the sitting-room. Scrooge -- in roughly the same position we last saw him -- lies in his bed atop his pillow. In the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, Scrooge awakens with a start and sits up in bed. He lights his candle and looks around. His bedside clock reads five minutes to one.

NARRATOR

(voice over)

Now, Marley's Ghost had warned Scrooge that a second spirit would haunt him at the stroke of one. I don't mind telling you that Scrooge was now prepared for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and a rhinoceros would have astonished him very much. By this time, he was ready for almost anything ...

From the church clock, the chimes strike one. Scrooge steels himself.

NARRATOR

(voice over)

... But, you see, he was not by any means ready for nothing ...

And nothing is exactly what happens. After a lengthy pause, Scrooge checks his clock, sighs and, with a last look around, blows out the candle and lies down on the bed. Suddenly, he bolts straight up -- staring at his bed-room door. Light is again streaming in from the sitting-room. Scrooge gets up softly and shuffles in his slippers to the door. His hand is on the lock when a voice from the sitting-room calls out.

VOICE

Scrooooooge? Come in, Scrooge!

A trembling Scrooge opens the door and enters:

INT. SCROOGE'S SITTING-ROOM

It's his own room, but it's undergone a transformation. The walls and ceiling are so hung with living green, that it looks a perfect grove; from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glisten. Crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe,

and ivy reflect back the light like so many little mirrors; and a mighty blaze roars in the fire-place. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, are turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that make the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch, there sits a jolly Giant, glorious to see: who carries a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and holds it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he comes peeping round the door.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Come in! Come in and know me better, man!

Scrooge enters timidly. The Spirit's eyes are clear and kind, but Scrooge does not look at them.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I am the Ghost of Christmas Present! Look upon me!

Scrooge does so. The ghost wears a simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur, hanging so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast is bare, as if disdainful to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, are also bare; and on its head it wears no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls are long and free: free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle is an antique scabbard; but with no sword in it, and the ancient sheath is eaten up with rust.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You have never seen the like of me before?

SCROOGE

Never.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Have never walked forth with 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?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Approximately eighteen hundred and forty-two.

SCROOGE

A tremendous family to provide for!

The Ghost of Christmas Present smiles and rises.

SCROOGE

Spirit, conduct me where you will. I went

forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Touch my robe!

Scrooge does as he's told, and holds it fast. Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanish instantly. So does the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night...

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Scrooge and the Spirit wander the city streets on Christmas morning, where the severe weather causes the people to make a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music, in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses. Scrooge and the Spirit see that the corner poulterer's shop is still open, and in its window hang two Prize Turkeys. One is the size of a boy, the other a little smaller. Happy crowds pour forth into the streets on their way to church, dressed in their Sunday best. Scrooge and the Spirit press on into Camden Town.

EXT. BOB CRATCHIT'S HOME

On the threshold of the door, Scrooge watches as the Spirit smiles and stops to bless Bob Cratchit's four-roomed house with an unspoken prayer.

INT. BOB CRATCHIT'S HOME

MRS CRATCHIT, Bob Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she lays the table-cloth, assisted by BELINDA, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while the adolescent Master PETER Cratchit plunges a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, then into his mouth. Two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, come tearing in, screaming something incomprehensible; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage-and-onion, these young Cratchits dance about the table. The eldest, Peter Cratchit, blows the fire, until the slow potatoes, bubbling up, knock loudly at the saucepan-lid.

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!

As if on cue, MARTHA, the eldest daughter, enters.

MARTHA

Here's Martha, mother!

THE TWO SMALL CRATCHITS

Here's Martha, mother! Hurrah! There's such  
a goose, Martha!

MRS. CRATCHIT

Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how

late you are!

Mrs Cratchit, kisses Martha, and takes off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal.

MARTHA

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!

THE TWO SMALL CRATCHITS

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

So Martha hides herself, and, to Scrooge's surprise -- for until now, he hadn't a clue as to whose house this was -- in comes little Bob Cratchit, the father, with at least three feet of comforter hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and TINY TIM upon his shoulder. He sets Tim down gently. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bears a little crutch, and has his limbs supported by an iron frame. He limps badly, favoring his right leg. Bob looks around.

BOB CRATCHIT

Why, where's our Martha?

MRS. CRATCHIT

Not coming.

BOB CRATCHIT

(heartbroken)

Not coming! Not coming upon Christmas Day!

Martha doesn't like to see him disappointed, even if it were only in joke; so she comes out prematurely from behind the closet door, and runs into his arms, while the two young Cratchits help Tiny Tim to the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper. Bob hugs Martha to his heart's content until she breaks away to tend to the supper. Husband and wife are alone for a moment.

MRS. CRATCHIT

And how did little Tim behave in church?

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 in church saw him, 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.

(a long pause)

He's growing stronger and heartier every day, isn't he?

The look that crosses Mrs Cratchit's face is not encouraging.

MRS. CRATCHIT

(quietly)

Yes, dear. He is.

With his active little crutch, Tiny Tim returns, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire;

THE TWO SMALL CRATCHITS

The goose is cooked! The goose is cooked!

CHRISTMAS DINNER MONTAGE

Bob Cratchit turns up his cuffs and compounds some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirs it round and round and puts it on the hob to simmer; Peter, and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits fetch the goose and carry it to the table. Mrs Cratchit pours the gravy, hissing hot; Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetens up the apple-sauce; Martha dusts the hot plates; Bob takes Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves. At last, the table is set -- goose, apple-sauce and mashed potatoes.

SCROOGE

(to the Spirit, matter-of-fact)

Hmmph. Not much of a goose.

TINY TIM

Bless us, O Lord! and these Thy gifts,  
which we are about to receive from Thy  
bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A breathless pause, as Mrs Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepares to plunge it in the breast; but when she does, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issues forth, one murmur of delight arises all round the table, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beats on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cries "Hurrah!" In a moment, everyone's mouth is full.

BOB CRATCHIT

(to Mrs Cratchit)

I don't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. So tender.

MARTHA

(to Mrs Cratchit)

And delicious.

ONE OF THE SMALL CRATCHITS

(to Mrs Cratchit)

And big.

MRS CRATCHIT

(wryly)  
And cheap.

TINY TIM  
(to Mrs Cratchit)  
It's lovely, Mother. This a goose we shall  
remember for as long as we live.

MRS. CRATCHIT  
Thank you, Tim.

After a DISSOLVE, Miss Belinda changes the plates. Mrs Cratchit is visibly nervous.

MRS. CRATCHIT  
I can't stand to look at the pudding.  
Suppose it should not be done enough?  
Suppose it should break in turning out?

BOB CRATCHIT  
(mock horror)  
Suppose somebody should have got over  
the wall of the back-yard, and stolen it,  
while we were eating the goose?

Bob's mouth makes a perfect O and his eyebrows almost leave his head. The two small Cratchits become livid and start yelling at him. Everyone roars with laughter at this, even Mrs Cratchit. Belinda bursts into the room accompanied by a great deal of steam and, in an instant, the pudding is out of the copper like a speckled cannon-ball, hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top. Everyone oohs and aahhs as Mrs Cratchit blushes and smiles proudly.

BOB CRATCHIT  
Oh, a wonderful pudding!

Bob Cratchit holds up a glass to propose a toast.

BOB CRATCHIT  
A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears.  
God bless us!

Which all the family re-echoes.

TINY TIM  
God bless us every one!

The family drinks and gets to work on the pudding. Tim sits very close to his father's side upon his little stool. Bob holds Tim's withered little hand in his, as if he wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him. Scrooge watches them with fascination -- it's a side of Cratchit he's never thought of. Without taking his eyes off them, he nods to the Spirit.

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

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

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.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race will find him here. What then?

(assuming Scrooge's voice)

If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.

Overcome with penitence and grief, Scrooge hangs his head to hear his own words quoted.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

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!

Scrooge bends before the Spirit's rebuke, and trembling, casts his eyes upon the ground.

BOB CRATCHIT

Mr Scrooge!

Scrooge looks up, startled to hear someone call his name. Bob Cratchit holds a glass up to him, making a toast.

BOB CRATCHIT

I'll give you Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!

MRS. CRATCHIT

(blushes)

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

(gently chiding)  
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, have some charity. It's 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!

The children drink the toast after her, the first time they show no heartiness. Tiny Tim drinks last of all, not caring. Scrooge sees he is the Ogre of the family and turns away from them, toward the window where the evening sun sets.

EXT. MOOR - SUNSET

Scrooge and the Spirit stand on a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone are cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; where nothing grows but moss and furze, and coarse, rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun leaves a streak of fiery red, which glares upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

SCROOGE  
What place is this?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT  
A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth. But they know me. See!

A light shines from the window of a hut, and swiftly Scrooge and the Spirit advance towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they find:

INT. HUT - NIGHT

A cheerful FAMILY assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire. The old man, in a quiet but fervent voice, sings them a Christmas song, and they all join in the chorus. The Spirit gestures to Scrooge to hold his robe, and the two rise up through the roof of the hut and high into:

EXT. THE NIGHT SKY

They fly above the moor, speeding out to sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he sees the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them;

EXT. THE OCEAN

The Spirit and Scrooge: two rapidly moving silhouettes skimming the ocean's surface.

EXT. LIGHTHOUSE

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafe and dash, there stands a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of sea-weed cling to its base, and storm-birds -- born of the wind one might suppose, as sea-weed of the water -- rise and fall about it, like the waves they skim.

INT. LIGHTHOUSE

Two LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS have made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall sheds out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they toast each other a Merry Christmas in their can of grog; and one of them -- the elder, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figure-head of an old ship might be -- strikes up the song heard in the miners' hut. Just outside their window, a hundred ten feet in the air, Scrooge and the Spirit watch. The Spirit gives Scrooge a tug -- and off they fly.

EXT. SHIP MONTAGE - DAY

As the sun rises on a distant horizon, Scrooge and the Spirit observe: the helmsman at the wheel as a fellow sailor quietly wishes him a Merry Christmas; the look-out in the bow as he hums a carol; two officers on watch exchanging gifts; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them, lost in thought. In the galley, an illiterate sailor dictates a letter to a friend.

SAILOR

(dictates)

My dearest, dearest Emily. The holiday season finds my thoughts turning ever more to you ...

(to the friend)

How's that, so far?

The friend merely looks at him and shrugs.

SAILOR

(dictates)

I should like to have been home this Christmas, but I am afraid I have been shanghaied ....

From behind him, Scrooge hears a long, hearty -- and familiar -- laugh. After a moment, he recognises it.

SCROOGE

Fred?

He turns toward the laugh, suddenly finding himself in:

INT. HIS NEPHEW'S SITTING-ROOM - NIGHT

A bright, dry, gleaming room in a finely-appointed house. The Spirit, standing smiling by Scrooge's side, looks at Scrooge's nephew with approving affability. Scrooge's nephew Fred laughs: holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions: Scrooge's NIECE, by marriage, laughs as heartily as he. And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roar out lustily.

FRED

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

NIECE

More shame for him, Fred!

Scrooge's niece is exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth, that seems made to be kissed -- as no doubt it often is; She is seated in a large chair with a footstool, in a snug corner right by the door -- and never leaves this position.

ONE OF THE GUESTS

I should very much like to meet your uncle, Fred. The droll way in which you portray him makes me curious.

FRED

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.

FRED

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.

ANOTHER WOMAN

Nor I.

FRED

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.  
Really, Fred, I think you're being awfully  
charitable.

FRED

If that's so, it may be because my mother,  
God rest her saintly soul, was very fond  
of him. She loved him.

The Spirit glances at Scrooge who tries to appear unmoved.

NIECE

But do go on, Fred.

(to the guests)

He never finishes what he begins to say.  
He is such a ridiculous fellow!

FRED

I was only going to say, that the  
consequence of his taking a dislike to us,  
and not making merry with us, is, as 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.

Before Fred finishes, one of the female guests has begun to play a simple  
little tune upon the harp; and the others choose partners and take to dancing  
about the room. There might be twenty people there, young and old, but they  
all dance. The rhythm is infectious and Scrooge keeps time with his feet,  
enjoying himself in a quiet way. The Spirit seems greatly pleased to find him  
in this mood.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HIS NEPHEW'S SITTING-ROOM

Later that evening. Everyone is seated. Scrooge's niece is in her usual  
chair by the door. Scrooge and the Spirit -- whose hair has by now greyed  
considerably -- stand nearby. One of the guests, TOPPER, stands in the

center of the room trying to keep everyone's attention.

TOPPER

Now, then, it's a Game called Yes and No.

(to Fred)

Since you're the host, you'll go first.

But Fred is reluctant and waves him off. The others jeer at him to take part and he forces himself to rise.

SCROOGE

(to the Spirit)

I think we should at least stay until the guests have departed.

FRED

(to Topper)

Oh, dear. What do I have to do?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I'm afraid that cannot be done.

SCROOGE

Here is a new game. One half hour, Spirit, only one!

TOPPER

(to Fred)

You think of something, anything, and the rest of us must find out what it is; But you may only answer our questions 'yes' or 'no', as the case may be.

FRED

Ah, all right. Well .... Oh, I've got it.

TOPPER

You've thought of something?

FRED

Yes. Fire away.

NOT TOO BRIGHT GUEST

Is it animal, vegetable, or mineral?

TOPPER

(to the guest)

No, no, no. It has to be a question he can answer 'yes' or 'no'.

(to Fred)

Are you thinking of an animal?

FRED

(grins)

Yes.

NOT TOO BRIGHT GUEST

Living or dead?

Everyone giggles at the Not Too Bright Guest. Topper sits down.

SOMEONE ELSE  
Is it living?

FRED  
Yes.

ANOTHER GUEST  
A wild animal?

FRED  
(laughs)  
Well ...

SOMEONE ELSE  
Can it be found in London?

FRED  
Yes. I'm afraid so.

ANOTHER GUEST  
Does it live in a menagerie?

FRED  
No! Wouldn't go near it.

THE PLUMP SISTER  
Is it a horse?

FRED  
No!

NIECE  
Is it an ass?

At this, Fred roars with laughter; and is so inexpressibly tickled, that he doubles over and stamps his foot.

FRED  
No!

SCROOGE  
Is it a cow?

The Spirit gives Scrooge a look as if to say: "They can't hear you..." and Scrooge scowls as if to say: "Shut up. I'm having fun."

SOMEONE ELSE  
Does it walk the streets?

FRED  
Yes!

NIECE

Is it some kind of rat?

FRED

(laughs, clutches his sides)

No! Maybe a pack-rat.

TOPPER

Wait! Is it a man?

Fred bites his lip to keep from laughing and nods, Yes.

THE PLUMP SISTER

I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred!

I know what it is!

SEVERAL GUESTS

(ad-lib)

What is it? What?

THE PLUMP SISTER

It's your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge!

FRED

Yes!

Everybody, even the Spirit, roars with laughter, except Scrooge, who is stunned -- and a trifle humiliated. The niece, right beside Scrooge, grins mischievously and wags a finger at Fred.

NIECE

That's not fair! When I asked 'Is it an ass?', you should have answered 'yes'!

Everybody roars even louder at this, except Scrooge, who is now completely humiliated. Fred picks up his glass of wine.

FRED

He has given us plenty of merriment, I am sure, and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. I say, 'Uncle Scrooge!'"

SEVERAL GUESTS

(ad-lib)

Well! Uncle Scrooge. Here's to 'im!

FRED

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!

The Ghost and Scrooge exchange glances. The niece drinks and sets down her empty glass.

INT. CHARITY WARD

Where someone else sets down an empty glass: a wretched woman with an infant

-- the one Scrooge saw from his window during the visit of Marley's Ghost -- one of many destitute people, wrapped in blankets, lying on cots in the crowded room. Scrooge watches as a young BOY comes around to pick up her glass. Others like him attend to a multitude of the sick and the poor.

WRETCHED WOMAN

Thank you. Thank you, so much.

BOY

Do you feel rested now?

WRETCHED WOMAN

I do. Bless your dear gentle heart. You know, my dear, I-I'm very grateful for all you're doing. If I'd've known you people were here, I'd've come sooner. And brought friends. There are a lot of people I know who could use your help-- Tell me, why-why aren't there more places like this?

The boy doesn't quite know how to respond.

BOY

I don't know.

He can only smile weakly, touch her arm, and move on. He walks past a couple of familiar faces: the two portly gentlemen who paid a visit to Scrooge the day before seeking a charitable donation. They stand off to one side surveying the scene with mixed emotions.

2ND GENTLEMAN

Quite a turn-out.

1ST GENTLEMAN

More than expected.

(matter-of-fact)

We haven't enough funds to last until next week.

2ND GENTLEMAN

Something will turn up, I'm sure.

Scrooge observes the 1st Gentleman pulling a fancy watch from his pocket and staring at it. The 2nd Gentleman looks him over sympathetically.

2ND GENTLEMAN

It's been long day. Thinking about going home to the family?

The 1st Gentleman shakes his head, No.

1ST GENTLEMAN

(wryly)

Thinking about selling a watch.

The watch reads but a few minutes before midnight.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE SHADOW OF A CHURCH TOWER

The church clock reads but a few minutes before midnight. Scrooge and the Spirit stand below it. While Scrooge remains unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost has grown older, clearly older, its hair whitened with age. Scrooge squints at the Spirit as they stand together.

SCROOGE

Your hair is grey. Are spirits' lives so short?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

My life is very brief. It ends to-night.

SCROOGE

To-night!

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

To-night at midnight.

Scrooge's gaze goes from the clock to the Spirit's robe.

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?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It might well be a claw, for all the flesh there is upon it. Look here.

From the foldings of its robe, it brings two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They kneel down at its feet, and cling upon the outside of its garment.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Oh, Man! look here. Look, look, down here!

A boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, has pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds.

SCROOGE

Spirit! are they yours?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

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!

The Spirit stretches out its hand towards the city.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

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?

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

(assuming Scrooge's voice)

Are there no prisons? Are there no  
workhouses?

Scrooge winces at this. The church bell strikes twelve. Scrooge looks about him. The Spirit is gone. Another, a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, comes, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

SCROOGE

(to himself)

Midnight. The last of the spirits.

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approaches. Scrooge bends down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Phantom moves it seems to scatter gloom and mystery. It is shrouded in a deep black garment, which conceals its head, its face, its form, and leaves nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would be difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it is surrounded. It is tall and stately and its mysterious presence fills Scrooge with a solemn dread. The Phantom neither speaks nor moves.

SCROOGE

I am in the presence of the Ghost of  
Christmas Yet To Come?

The Phantom answers not, but 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?

The upper portion of the garment contracts for an instant in its folds, as if the Phantom had nodded its head.

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?

It gives him no reply. The hand 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!

The Phantom moves away as it had come towards him. Scrooge follows in its shadow, which seems to bear him up and carry him along.

INT. THE LONDON EXCHANGE - DAY

They scarcely seem to enter the Exchange; for the Exchange rather seems to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. They stand amongst the businessmen; The Phantom stops and points to one little knot of men. Scrooge peers at them. Among them are the fat man and the red-faced man he had spoken to the day before.

SCROOGE

Yes, I know these gentlemen. Business  
associates.

The Phantom continues to point. Scrooge takes the hint and advances to listen to their talk.

FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN

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

2nd MAN

When did he die?

FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN

Last night, I believe.

3rd MAN

Why, what was the matter with him? I thought  
he'd never die.

FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN

(yawns)  
God knows.

RED-FACED MAN WITH A  
PENDULOUS EXCRESCENCE

What has he done with his money?

FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN

I haven't heard. Left it to his Company,  
perhaps. He hasn't left it to me. That's all  
I know.

Everyone laughs.

FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN

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?

RED-FACED MAN WITH A  
PENDULOUS EXCRESCENCE

I don't mind going if a lunch is provided.  
But I must be fed, if I make one.

Another laugh.

FAT MAN WITH A MONSTROUS CHIN

Well, I am the most disinterested among you,  
after all, for I never wear black gloves,  
and I never eat lunch. But I'll 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!

The men stroll away, and mix with other groups. Scrooge looks towards the  
Spirit for an explanation. The Phantom glides on into another street.

EXT. LONDON EXCHANGE

The Phantom's finger points to two middle-aged men meeting on the massive  
stone steps.

SCROOGE

(to the Phantom)

I know these men, perfectly. Men of  
business: very wealthy, and of great  
importance. I've made a point always of  
standing well in their esteem -- in a  
business point of view, that is; strictly  
business.

1st BUSINESSMAN

How are you?

2nd BUSINESSMAN

How are you?

1st BUSINESSMAN

Well! Old Scratch has got his own at last,  
hey?

2nd BUSINESSMAN

So I am told. Cold, isn't it?

1st BUSINESSMAN

Seasonable for Christmas time. You're not  
a skaiter, I suppose?

2nd BUSINESSMAN

No. No. Something else to think of. Good  
morning!

The two men part. A puzzled Scrooge follows the Phantom through the streets.

EXT. CITY STREET

A busy street corner. Scrooge peers curiously at the Phantom.

SCROOGE

I am rather surprised that you should  
attach importance to conversations  
apparently so trivial.

No response from the Phantom.

SCROOGE

They must have some hidden purpose, or  
else you wouldn't be showing them to me.  
Is that right?

No response.

SCROOGE

They could scarcely have any bearing on  
the death of Jacob, my old partner, for  
his death was in the Past, and this is  
the Future.

Scrooge looks around at the multitudes of pedestrians pouring past him.

SCROOGE

I can't help but notice that this is my  
accustomed corner, and I see by the clock  
that this is my usual time of day for being  
here... but I see no likeness of myself.

Caught up in what he's saying, Scrooge fails to see the Phantom move off.

SCROOGE

Not that I'm surprised, you understand.  
You see, I've been revolving in my mind a,  
er, change of life. And I should like to  
think... that is, I rather hope... that my  
not being here is the result of my having  
carried out some, ah, resolutions regarding --

Scrooge suddenly notices that the Phantom has moved on down the street and hurriedly follows it.

EXT. BAD PART OF TOWN - DUSK

Scrooge trails the Phantom, looking over this neighborhood, near sunset. The ways are foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorge their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the stragglng streets; and the whole quarter reeks with crime, with filth, and misery.

INT. SHOP - NIGHT

A low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, are bought. Upon the floor within, are piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise are bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones. Sitting in among the wares he deals in, by a charcoal stove, made of old bricks, is a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age who smokes his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement. This is OLD JOE.

Scrooge and the Phantom come into his presence, just as a CHARWOMAN with a heavy bundle slinks into the shop. But she has scarcely entered, when another woman, a LAUNDRESS, similarly laden, comes in too; and she is closely followed by a man in faded black, an UNDERTAKER, who is no less startled by the sight of them, than they had been upon the recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which Old Joe joins them, they all three burst into a laugh.

CHARWOMAN

(to all)

Let the charwoman alone to be the first!  
Let the laundress alone to be the second;  
and let the undertaker's man alone to be  
the third.

(to Old Joe)

Look here, old Joe, here's a chance! If we  
haven't all three met here without meaning  
it!

OLD JOE

You couldn't have met in a better place.  
Come into the parlour. You were made free  
of it long ago, you know; and the other two  
ain't strangers. Stop till I shut the door  
of the shop.

He shuts the door which creaks badly.

OLD JOE

Ah! There ain't such a rusty bit of metal  
in the place as its own hinges, I believe;  
and I'm sure there's no such old bones here,  
as mine. Ha, ha! We're all suitable to our  
calling, we're well matched. Come into the  
parlour. Come into the parlour.

They follow him into:

INT. THE PARLOUR

A space behind a screen of rags. Old Joe rakes the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp, with the stem of his pipe, puts it in his mouth again. While he does this, the charwoman throws her bundle on the floor, and sits down in a flaunting manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a bold defiance at the other two.

CHARWOMAN

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

LAUNDRESS

That's true, indeed! No man more so.

CHARWOMAN

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?

LAUNDRESS

No, indeed!

UNDERTAKER

We should hope not.

CHARWOMAN

Very well, then! That's enough. Who's the  
worse for the loss of a few things like  
these? Not a dead man, I suppose.

LAUNDRESS

No, indeed!

CHARWOMAN

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.

LAUNDRESS

It's the truest word that ever was spoke.  
It's a judgment on him.

CHARWOMAN

I wish it was a little heavier judgment,  
and it should have been, you may depend  
upon it, if I could have laid my hands on  
anything else.

(turns to Old Joe)

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.

But the undertaker mounts the breach first and produces his plunder of which  
there's not much: a seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons,  
and a brooch of no great value. Old Joe examines and appraises them and then  
chalks up his asking price for each, upon the wall, and adds them up into a

total.

OLD JOE

(to the undertaker)

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

The laundress is next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Old Joe chalks her account on the wall in the same manner. As he does, Scrooge turns to the Phantom beside him.

SCROOGE

This is disgusting. I can't look at this. Haven't you anything better to show me?

Scrooge turns his back on the group and stares at the wall.

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.

CHARWOMAN

And now undo my bundle, Joe.

Joe goes down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening her bundle, and having unfastened a great many knots, drags out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff. It's Scrooge's bed-curtains.

OLD JOE

What do you call this? Bed-curtains?

The charwoman laughs and leans forward on her crossed arms.

CHARWOMAN

Ah! Bed-curtains!

OLD JOE

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

CHARWOMAN

Yes I do. Why not?

Scrooge, still with his back to the scene, listens to this dialogue in horror.

SCROOGE

Huh! Rings and all!

OLD JOE

You were born to make your fortune, and

you'll certainly do it.

CHARWOMAN

(coolly)

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.

Old Joe pulls out some more material.

CHARWOMAN

Joe, don't drop that oil upon the blankets, now.

OLD JOE

His blankets?

CHARWOMAN

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

Old Joe stops and looks up.

OLD JOE

I hope he didn't die of anything catching? Eh?

CHARWOMAN

Don't you be afraid of that. I ain'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?

CHARWOMAN

Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure. Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If calico ain'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.

As they sit grouped about their spoil, in the scanty light afforded by Old Joe's lamp, the three watch old Joe put the various items out of sight and produce a flannel bag with money in it. He doles out payment to each. Scrooge turns to watch.

CHARWOMAN

Ha, ha! This is the end of it, you see! He

frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead!  
Ha, ha, ha!

A sickened Scrooge turns to the Phantom.

SCROOGE

Spirit! I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now. That is the lesson I am to draw from this poor man's fate, is it not?

The Phantom, as if in anger at Scrooge's stupidity, violently lashes out -- spreading its dark robe over Scrooge, momentarily blinding him -- then whips the robe away to reveal:

INT. DARK ROOM

Scrooge finds himself in a dark room, almost touching a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed.

SCROOGE

Merciful Heaven, what is this?

The room is very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glances 'round it, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, falls straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, is the body of a man.

NARRATOR

(voice over)

Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honoured head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man's. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal.

Under the voice over: Scrooge glances towards the Phantom. Its steady hand points to the covered head. Scrooge hesitantly approaches the dead man and attempts to uncover its face. But he cannot bring himself to do so. His hand shakes and he backs away. A cat meows somewhere in the dark. Scrooge, his face dripping with sweat, turns to the Phantom.

SCROOGE

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

Still the Phantom points with an unmoved finger to the head.

SCROOGE

I understand you and I would look at this  
dead man's face, if I could. But I have  
not the power, Spirit. I have not the power.

The Phantom seems to look upon 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 light that falls from above instantly flashes, momentarily blinding  
Scrooge. When his eyes clear:

INT. BRIGHT ROOM - DAY

Scrooge stands in a room by daylight, where a mother and her children sit.  
The children play quietly. The mother looks out the window; glances at the  
clock, and tries, but in vain, to work with her needle. At the sound of a  
knock, she hurries to the door, and meets her husband; a man whose face,  
though young, is careworn and depressed. There is a remarkable expression in  
it now; a kind of serious delight of which he feels ashamed, and which he  
struggles to repress.

SHE

Tell me the news.

He appears embarrassed how to answer.

SHE

Is it good ... or bad?

HE

Bad.

SHE

We are quite ruined?

HE

No. There is hope yet, Caroline.

SHE

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

HE

He is past relenting. He is dead.

After a long moment, the news sinks in.

SHE

(genuinely)

I am thankful in my soul to hear that.

(a little less convincingly)  
May God forgive me for having said such a  
thing.

She clasps her hands together in joy.

HE

When I tried to see him and obtain a  
week's delay, his charwoman told me he was  
ill; 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.

SHE

To whom will our debt be transferred?

HE

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 to-night with light  
hearts, Caroline!

Their hearts are clearly lighter. The children's faces, hushed and clustered  
round to hear what they so little understood, are brighter; Standing in the  
sunlight, next to a window, Scrooge slowly turns to the Phantom.

SCROOGE

So ... it's a happier house for this man's  
death! Is that the only emotion you can  
show me -- pleasure?

(beat)

But then I don't suppose one can find much  
tenderness connected with a death?

The Phantom reaches up and pulls down the window-shade, blocking the sun,  
darkening the room. The Phantom releases the shade and it snaps up and out  
of view to reveal a night sky and the reflection of a lit fireplace in the  
glass. Scrooge looks at the glass a moment before turning to see where he  
is.

INT. BOB CRATCHIT'S HOME - NIGHT

Mrs. Cratchit and the children sit round the fire. Quiet. Very quiet. The  
noisy little Cratchits are as still as statues in one corner, and sit looking  
up at Peter, who has a book before him. The mother and her daughters sew.

PETER

(reads aloud)

... He shall cover thee with his feathers,  
and under his wings shalt thou trust: his  
truth shall be thy shield and buckler.  
Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by  
night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;  
Nor for the pestilence that walketh in

darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him....

Peter looks up to see Mrs Cratchit lay her work upon the table and put her hand up to her face.

PETER

Shall I stop reading?

MRS. CRATCHIT

No, no. It's only the colour. It hurts my eyes.

Scrooge is puzzled by this: he peers intently at the group. Black is the colour of the material in the women's hands. Mrs. Cratchit regains her composure.

MRS. CRATCHIT

They're better now again. It makes them weak by candle-light; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time.

PETER

Past it rather. But I think he has walked a little slower than he used to these last few evenings, mother.

Peter shuts his Bible. They are very quiet again. A long pause, and then Mrs Cratchit speaks in a steady, cheerful voice, that only falters once.

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.

MRS. CRATCHIT

But he was very light to carry, and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble: no trouble.

A noise stirs her.

MRS. CRATCHIT

And there is your father at the door!

Bob in his comforter comes in -- alone. As the family greets him with his cup of tea in an unusually subdued fashion, it finally dawns on Scrooge what has happened.

SCROOGE

Oh, my God...

The Phantom makes no move. Scrooge watches as the Cratchit family draws about the fire; Peter tries to read silently to himself; the girls and mother return to their sewing; Bob sips his tea.

BOB CRATCHIT

(pleasantly)

I ran into Mr. Scrooge's nephew in the street today. He thought I looked a little -- just a little down, you know -- and he inquired as to what had happened to distress me. On which, for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, I told him. "I am heartily sorry for it, Mr Cratchit," he said, "and heartily sorry for your good wife."

(pause)

By the bye, how he ever knew that, I don't know.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Knew what?

BOB CRATCHIT

Why, that you were a good wife.

Mrs. Cratchit smiles.

PETER

Everybody knows that.

BOB CRATCHIT

I hope they do. "Heartily sorry," he said, "for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way, be sure to let me know" -- and he handed me his card. 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 CRATCHIT

You would be surer of it, if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn't be at all surprised if he got Peter a better situation.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Hear that, Peter?

MARTHA

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

PETER

(grins)

Get along with you!

BOB CRATCHIT

(to Peter)

It's just as likely as not, one of these days; though there's plenty of time for that.

(to all)

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?

THE CHILDREN

(ad-lib)

Never, father! No. Of course not.

BOB CRATCHIT

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

THE CHILDREN

(ad-lib)

No, never, father! That's right.

BOB CRATCHIT

(at the point of tears)

I am very happy. I am very happy.

Mrs Cratchit kisses him, his daughters kiss him, the two young Cratchits kiss him, and Peter shakes his hand. Bob abruptly leaves the room, and goes upstairs. The family members look at one another with concern.

INT. UPSTAIRS ROOM

A bedroom, cheerfully lit, and hung with Christmas decorations. Bob enters hesitantly and sits down in a chair close to the bed. After he composes himself with an unspoken prayer, he leans over and kisses the face of Tiny Tim, whose body we now see stretched out, lifeless, on the bed. Bob breaks down all at once.

BOB CRATCHIT  
(nearly inaudible)  
My little, little child. My little child.

Scrooge watches grimly from the far side of the room. The Phantom stands beside him. Scrooge shuts his eyes.

SCROOGE  
(to the Phantom)  
Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying  
dead.

When Scrooge opens his eyes...

EXT. LONDON STREET

Scrooge and the Phantom are halfway between Scrooge's counting-house and the church tower opposite it. The Phantom leads Scrooge toward the church. But Scrooge, seeing the counting-house, grasps the Phantom's robe.

SCROOGE  
Wait. That is where my place of occupation  
is, and has been for a length of time. Let  
me behold what I shall be, in days to come.

The Phantom stops; the hand points elsewhere.

SCROOGE  
My office is yonder. Why do you point away?

The inexorable finger undergoes no change.

SCROOGE  
Just wait a moment, please.

Scrooge rushes off.

EXT. COUNTING-HOUSE

Scrooge nervously hastens to the window of his office, and looks in. It's an office still, but not his. The furniture is not the same, and the figure in the chair is not himself.

EXT. LONDON STREET

The Phantom points as before. Scrooge joins the Phantom once again, confused, and accompanies it until they reach an iron gate. He pauses to look round before entering.

EXT. THE CHURCH YARD

A row of gravestones. Walled in by houses; overrun by grass and weeds. The Phantom stands among the graves, and points down to One. Scrooge advances towards it, trembling. Then stops.

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?

Still the Phantom points downward to the grave by which it stands.

SCROOGE

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 Phantom is immovable as ever. Scrooge creeps toward the grave, trembling; and following the finger, reads upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge falls to his knees.

SCROOGE

Am I that man who lay upon the bed?

The finger points from the grave to Scrooge, and back again.

SCROOGE

No, Spirit! Oh no, no!

The finger still is there. Scrooge scrambles to his feet and clutches the Phantom's robe.

SCROOGE

Spirit! Hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intervention. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?

For the first time, the hand appears to shake. Scrooge falls down before it, sobbing violently, his face wet with tears.

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 kind hand trembles.

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!

In his agony, as he catches the spectral hand, Scrooge sees an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrinks, collapses, and dwindles down into a

bedpost.

INT. SCROOGE'S BED-ROOM

Yes! and the bedpost is his own. Scrooge lets go of the post and scrambles out of bed, falling to his knees. He is out of his mind, babbling like a lunatic.

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 Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!

Scrooge folds a bed-curtain over his arm.

SCROOGE

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!

Scrooge's hands are busy with his garments all this time: turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, etc. He laughs and cries in the same breath, stumbling out of the bed-room.

INT. SCROOGE'S SITTING-ROOM

Scrooge stands there: perfectly winded.

SCROOGE

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 school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!

Scrooge starts off again, going round the fire-place.

SCROOGE

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! There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits! It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha ha ha!

Really, for a man who has been out of practice for so many years, it's a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs.

SCROOGE

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!

He pauses as the church bell rings out the hour. Scrooge starts babbling  
along with it.

SCROOGE  
Clash, clang, hammer, ding, dong, bell!  
Bell, dong, ding, hammer, clang, clash!  
Oh, glorious, glorious!

He runs to the window, hurls it open, and looks out.

EXT. SCROOGE'S BUILDING - DAY

Not a trace of fog or darkness. Golden sunlight; Heavenly blue sky; merry  
bells. Not too many people on the street.

SCROOGE  
Oh, glorious. Glorious!

Scrooge spots a BOY IN SUNDAY CLOTHES, loitering on the sidewalk below.

SCROOGE  
What's to-day?

BOY IN SUNDAY CLOTHES  
Eh?

SCROOGE  
What's to-day, my fine fellow?

BOY IN SUNDAY CLOTHES  
To-day? 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.  
(to the boy)  
Hallo, my fine fellow!

BOY IN SUNDAY CLOTHES  
Hallo!

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

BOY IN SUNDAY CLOTHES  
I should hope I did.

SCROOGE

(to himself)

An intelligent boy! A remarkable boy!

(to the boy)

Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize Turkey; the big one?

BOY IN SUNDAY CLOTHES

What, the one as big as me?

SCROOGE

(to himself)

What a delightful boy! It's a pleasure to talk to him.

(to the boy)

Yes, my buck!

BOY IN SUNDAY CLOTHES

It's hanging there now.

SCROOGE

Is it? Go and buy it.

The boy stares in disbelief for a moment, then thumbs his nose at Scrooge in disgust.

BOY IN SUNDAY CLOTHES

Walk-er!

SCROOGE

No, no, I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, that I may give them the directions 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 takes off running down the street.

INT. SCROOGE'S SITTING-ROOM

Scrooge rubs his hands and laughs. He writes Bob Cratchit's address on a slip of paper with an unsteady hand.

SCROOGE

I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's! He sha'n't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob's will be!

EXT. SCROOGE'S BUILDING

Moments later, Scrooge opens the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man. As he stands there, with the slip of paper in his hand, the

knocker catches his eye. He pats it with his hand.

SCROOGE

I shall love it, as long as I live! I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It's a wonderful knocker!

The boy and the POULTERER'S MAN arrive with a gigantic turkey.

SCROOGE

(to the knocker)

Here's the Turkey.

(to the turkey-bearers)

Hallo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!

Scrooge inspects the turkey -- it never could have stood upon its legs, that bird. It would have snapped 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

SCROOGE

Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town. You must have a cab.

Scrooge chuckles as he says this, and we go into a

CHRISTMAS DAY MONTAGE

Scrooge chuckles as he pays for the Turkey, chuckles as he pays for the cab, chuckles as he recompenses the boy, chuckles as he sits down breathless in his sitting-room chair again, and chuckles till he cries.

Scrooge shaves at his wash-basin. His hand shakes very much; partly because he is laughing and dancing with joy. At one point, he nicks himself and laughs even harder.

Out in the street, Scrooge is dressed in his Sunday best. By this time, crowds pour forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; Walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regards every one with a delighted smile. He looks so irresistibly pleasant that three or four good-humoured fellows say, "Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!" Scrooge reacts as if these are the sweetest sounds he's ever heard and returns the greeting.

Farther down the street, Scrooge suddenly tenses up. Coming on towards him he sees the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" Scrooge slows down for a moment, then resolves himself to what he must do. He quickens his pace and takes the gentleman by both his hands.

SCROOGE

My dear sir. How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!

1st GENTLEMAN

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 his ear. The gentleman reacts as if his breath were gone.

1st GENTLEMAN

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 GENTLEMAN

(shakes Scrooge's hand)

My dear sir. 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 GENTLEMAN

I will!

SCROOGE

Thank 'ee. I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!

CHRISTMAS DAY MONTAGE CONTINUES

Several views of Scrooge in church. It's been years since his last visit and he looks around nervously upon entering. During the singing of a hymn, everyone knows the words by heart, save Scrooge -- who rapidly thumbs through a hymn-book, until the little boy sitting on his right hands him his own hymn-book opened to the correct page, whereupon Scrooge nods to him in thanks. Later, Scrooge pulls out a huge wad of bills and puts entirely too much money in the collection plate before handing it to the astonished woman on his left -- and upon seeing her startled look, he hastily removes a few more bills from the wad and places them in the plate with an impish grin.

Scrooge walks about the streets, watches the people hurrying to and fro, pats children on the head, questions beggars, looks down into the kitchens of houses, up into the windows: and finds that all these things yield him pleasure.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

In a nice part of town. Scrooge paces uncertainly outside. He slowly approaches the front door but at the last moment, he returns to the sidewalk.

Finally, he takes a deep breath, finds the courage to go up and knock, and makes a dash for it. He knocks and stands there, tight-lipped and shaking nervously. No answer. He begins to leave. A maid opens the door.

SCROOGE  
Is your master at home, my dear?

MAID  
Yes, sir.

SCROOGE  
Where is he, my love?

MAID  
He's in the sitting-room, sir, along with  
mistress. I'll show you in, if you please.

INT. HOUSE

The maid leads Scrooge to the closed sitting-room door.

SCROOGE  
Thank 'ee. He knows me. I'll go just in,  
my dear.

Scrooge crosses to the sitting-room and tenses up as he puts his hand on the doorknob. The maid sees this and watches Scrooge curiously. Scrooge looks up to see her staring at him. From his face, it's clear to her that he is scared to enter and she gives him a reassuring nod and smile. Scrooge returns the smile and, taking a deep breath, he turns the doorknob gently and sidles his face in, round the door.

INT. HIS NEPHEW'S SITTING-ROOM

Scrooge sees his nephew Fred surrounded by his party guests -- all laughing a long, hearty laugh, exactly as Scrooge had heard it when with the Spirit.

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

SCROOGE  
Fred!

Scrooge flings the door open and startles his niece who is, as before, sitting in the chair in the corner right by the door. Scrooge is at once apologetic and turns to her.

SCROOGE  
Oh, I'm so sorry. I forgot you were there.

She doesn't know quite what to make of that. Scrooge's back is momentarily turned toward his nephew who gazes on him in disbelief.

FRED  
Why bless my soul! Who's that?

Scrooge turns around to face his astonished nephew, then nervously threads his way through the guests to confront him.

SCROOGE

It's I. Your uncle Scrooge.

An awkward pause ensues as everyone merely stares at Scrooge -- a skunk at a garden party. He realizes he must try to break the ice.

SCROOGE  
(flawlessly imitates The Plump Sister)  
It's your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge!

Scrooge flashes a happy grin. The guests stare at him in confusion. He grows immediately sober.

SCROOGE  
(to Fred)  
I have come as you asked. Will you let me in, Fred?

FRED  
Let you in! I --

Fred bursts out laughing again and shakes Scrooge's hand so hard, it's a mercy he doesn't take his arm off. Fred is still laughing as some of the other guests crowd around Scrooge, greeting him, patting him on the back, bringing him a drink. Some of the others move away from him and whisper among themselves: Surely this isn't the Uncle Scrooge!

ONE OF THE GUESTS  
(to Scrooge)  
You know, I have always wanted to meet you, Mr. Scrooge. The droll way in which your nephew portrays you has made me curious. I say, have you met Mister...?

One of the female guests has begun to play a simple little tune upon the harp; and the others choose partners and take to dancing about the room. There might be twenty people there, young and old, but they all dance. Including, for the first time in years, Ebenezer Scrooge.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COUNTING-HOUSE - DAY

The day after Christmas. Bright sunshine pours into Scrooge's office. All is quiet save for the ticking of the clock -- which reads 9:18. Scrooge sits behind his desk, grinning like a madman, with his door wide open so that he might see Bob Cratchit come into his tank-like office. Bob bursts in, his hat and comforter already off. He jumps on his stool in a jiffy, driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock. Meanwhile, trying to suppress a grin, Scrooge manages an approximation of his old caustic personality.

SCROOGE  
Cratchit! You're late! What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?

BOB CRATCHIT  
I am very sorry, sir. I am behind my time.

SCROOGE

You are? Yes. I think you are. Step this way, if you please.

Bob reluctantly leaves the Tank and joins Scrooge in the office.

BOB CRATCHIT

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

Scrooge leaps from his chair, and gives Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggers back into the Tank again.

SCROOGE

... and therefore I am about to raise your salary!

Bob gasps, trembles, and inches away from Scrooge, picking up a nearby ruler to use in self-defense.

SCROOGE

A merry Christmas, Bob! A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year!

(quietly)

I'm going to raise your salary. And if you'll let me, I'd like to try to help your family.

An incredulous Bob stares at Scrooge for a long, long moment.

SCROOGE

(laughs)

Well, let's discuss it this afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit.

Scrooge grins at a still uncertain Bob Cratchit. The distant sound of carolers singing an appropriate hymn grows louder.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SITTING-ROOM - NIGHT

The Narrator looks down at the book in his lap, a quiet smile on his face. Outside his window, a small group of carolers slowly approach continuing the hymn. The young people circled around the Narrator seem edgy and dissatisfied.

NARRATOR

And that's the story.

THE SKEPTICAL ADOLESCENT

How much of that was true?

NARRATOR

(matter-of-fact)

Well, I was there for some of it. And I heard about some of it.

(winks)

And I made up the rest.

The children laugh.

THE SKEPTICAL ADOLESCENT

Yeah, but did old man Scrooge really keep his word?

NARRATOR

Yes. In fact, he was better than his word. He did everything he said he would, and much more.

THE TEN YEAR OLD GIRL

(concerned)

What happened to Tiny Tim? Did he --?  
Did he --?

NARRATOR

(reassuring)

No. Tiny Tim did not die. And Scrooge was like a second father to him.

(a faraway look in his eye)

He became as good a friend, as good a teacher, and as good a man, as any person could hope to know.

The girl seems reassured.

THE SKEPTICAL ADOLESCENT

(laughs)

Oh, come on. People just don't change like that overnight.

NARRATOR

(shrugs)

In fact, a lot of people laughed at him when he changed, but he let them laugh, and didn't pay any attention to it; I think he was smart enough to know that nothing good ever happens in this world that people won't laugh at it -- at first. And that it's better to make people laugh than make them do some other things I can think of.

(beat)

His own heart laughed: and I think that was

good enough for him.

THE ADOLESCENT WHO  
WISHED HE WAS AN ADULT

And do you mean to say that he had no  
further intercourse with Spirits?

NARRATOR

Ah, well...

(mischievous grin)

After that, he adopted the principle of  
abstinence and no Spirits ever visited him  
again, as far as he knew.

The Narrator glances around at his audience but there are no more questions.  
He decides to add a final word.

NARRATOR

Well... It was always said of Mr. Scrooge  
that if anyone knew how to keep Christmas  
well, it was him. If only that could truly  
be said of us. Of all of us. Merry  
Christmas.

The Narrator returns the book to the ten year old girl.

THE TEN YEAR OLD GIRL

(quietly, to herself)

... and may God Bless Us, Every One.

The Narrator smiles. Outside, the caroling has gotten steadily louder. A  
tapping sound causes everyone to turn to the window, where the carolers  
beckon to them. Everyone in the room hollers ("Hey!" "Look who's here!").  
They rise and rush to the front door -- except for the ten year old girl who  
lingers to help the Narrator to his feet. He thanks her and, hand in hand,  
they follow the others to the door. For the first time, we see he carries a  
cane. And limps, favoring his right leg. Could this be Tiny Tim all grown  
up? They join the little crowd just outside the door -- carolers and  
children -- in singing "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" or some such thing.

EXT. THE FRONT DOORSTEP

As they sing, their breath visible in the cold night air, we PAN UP and AWAY  
to find ...

EXT. ROOFTOP

A spectral figure leaning over the edge of the roof, peering down, smiling at  
the music. It is MARLEY'S GHOST, a look of peace and satisfaction on its no  
longer glassy face. Marley turns to reveal another ghost right beside him --  
Scrooge's. To the surprise of both, the chain 'round Marley's body jerks to  
life and begins to unspool rapidly, falling away from him as if there were a  
ship's anchor at the end of it. In a moment, the chain is gone and Marley is  
free. He clutches his waist and looks himself over. And then beams at  
Scrooge gratefully. Scrooge grins, then realizes something. Suddenly, he  
reaches up with his left hand and removes the wrapper that keeps Marley's jaw  
in place. The jaw does not drop. Marley clicks his teeth together a few

times to test them, then breaks into a broad smile. He mouths a "Thank you" to Scrooge. The two ghosts shake hands. Scrooge looks down at the wrapper in his hand and, with a flourish, tosses it over the edge. The two ghosts take flight, into a night sky teeming with free spirits, as the group below finishes singing... a Christmas carol.

FADE OUT

A long, silent pause.

FADE IN on what appears to be the FLOOR of Scrooge's room upon which rests the extinguisher cap last seen covering the Ghost of Christmas Past. The cap tips over and the ghost appears from under it in a dazzling burst of light. The ghost's FACE fills the screen and, after a wink, it begins to morph into the faces of all the featured actors. As each actor's face appears, their credit is superimposed beneath them. The final image is of Tiny Tim in Scrooge's arms, giving the old man a hug.

TINY TIM

(whispers)

May God bless us, every one.

The image blurs and spirals away under the extinguisher cap and suddenly all is dark.

END CREDITS

FADE OUT