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Written by

Patrick Barlow

Adapted from the story by Charles Dickens

SERVING THEATRE
SF
SINCE 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-11147-1

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The UK premiere of *A Christmas Carol* was produced by Sonia Friedman Productions at the Noël Coward Theatre, London and first performed on 30th November, 2015 with the following cast:

Ebenezer Scrooge	**Jim Broadbent**
Bob Cratchit, Marley, Young Scrooge	**Adeel Akhtar**
Hermione Bentham, Ghost of Christmas Past, Constance, Mrs Cratchit, Mother	**Amelia Bullmore**
Frederick, Mr Grimes, Mr Fezziwig, George, Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come	**Keir Charles**
Mrs Lack, Lavinia Bentham, Mrs Grimes, Fran, Isabella, Ghost of Christmas Present, Maid	**Samantha Spiro**
Ensemble Puppeteer	**Jack Parker**
Ensemble Puppeteer	**Kim Scopes**

Director	**Phelim McDermott**
Designer	**Tom Pye**
Director of Movement	**Toby Sedgwick**
Lighting Designer	**Peter Mumford**
Sound Designer	**Gareth Fry**
Music Supervisor & Arranger	**Steven Edis**

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This play is written for five actors and two puppeteers. Three men and three women. One actor plays Scrooge throughout. Everybody else plays everybody else.

CHARACTERS

ACTOR ONE (M)

EBENEZER SCROOGE – standard English – 50–60

ACTOR TWO (M)

BOB CRATCHIT – cockney – 40

MARLEY'S GHOST – standard English – 50–60

YOUNG SCROOGE – standard – 16–19

LITTLE SCROOGE – standard – 8

PETER CRATCHIT – cockney – 14

KATIE CRATCHIT – cockney – 9

BOY IN STREET – cockney – 12

FREDERICK'S CHILDREN – standard – 3–12

VARIOUS NARRATORS, CAROL SINGERS, DEBTORS, SPIRITS, SKATERS, ETC.

ACTOR THREE (F)

MRS LACK – cockney – 40

LAVINIA BENTHAM – standard – 35

MRS GRIMES – Northern English – 60

FRAN – standard – 18

ISABELLA – Sweet spoken Irish – 18–28

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT – cockney/various 60

MARTHA CRATCHIT – cockney – 16

FREDERICK'S HOUSEMAID – cockney – 30

VARIOUS NARRATORS, CAROL SINGERS, DEBTORS, SPIRITS, SKATERS, ETC.

ACTOR FOUR (F)

HERMIONE BENTHAM – standard – 35

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST – standard – 40

CONSTANCE – standard – 30

MRS CRATCHIT – cockney – 40

MOTHER – standard – 40

VARIOUS NARRATORS, CAROL SINGERS, DEBTORS, SPIRITS, SKATERS, ETC.

ACTOR FIVE (M)

FREDERICK – standard – 35

MR GRIMES – Northern English – 60

MR FEZZIWIG – Irish – 50

GEORGE – standard – 30

KATE CRATCHIT – cockney – 10

ABIGAIL CRATCHIT – cockney – 10

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME – standard – 50–150

PASSER–BY – cockney – 20

VARIOUS NARRATORS, CAROL SINGERS, DEBTORS, SPIRITS, SKATERS, ETC.

PUPPETEER ONE (F)

LITTLE SCROOGE, TINY TIM, VARIOUS CHILDREN, SPIRITS, PHANTOMS, URSULA CRATCHIT ETC.

PUPPETEER TWO (M)

LITTLE SCROOGE, TINY TIM, VARIOUS CHILDREN, SPIRITS, PHANTOMS, PETER CRATCHIT ETC.

SETTING

London

TIME

1842 and before and beyond

ACT ONE

Prologue

FOUR ACTORS *stroll on. They are dressed in Victorian hats, coats and mufflers. There is a large door centre stage. They all stand round the door and launch into:*

CAROL: HERE WE COME A'WASSAILING.

They stop singing. They wait. No-one comes. They wait. They knock. Still no-one comes. They wait. Look at one another. Turn to the audience. They begin the tale.

ACTOR 3 Marley was dead to begin with.

ACTOR 2 Dead as a doornail.

ACTOR 4 And you can't get much deader than that.

ACTOR 5 Jacob Marley.

ACTOR 3 Dead and buried in Cripplegate graveyard.

ACTOR 4 The day before Christmas.

ACTOR 2 A year ago to the day.

ACTOR 5 Witnessed by four attendants.

ACTOR 3 The clergyman.

ACTOR 4 The clerk.

ACTOR 2 The undertaker.

ACTOR 5 And the chief and sole mourner.

ACTOR 3 Ebenezer.

ACTOR 4 Obadiah

ALL Scrooge.

ACTOR 2 And that was the end of it.

ACTOR 5 Or was it?

SCROOGE'S VOICE *(o.s.)* Cratchit?

ACTOR 2 *freezes. Immediately becomes* **CRATCHIT**.

CRATCHIT Yes sir Mr Scrooge sir?

The other **ACTORS** *run off. They return with* **CRATCHIT***'s hat, coat and scarf. They put them on him. Carry on a phonograpgh and grandfather clock. They run off, leaving* **CRATCHIT** *alone.*

Reveal:

Scrooge's Counting House. Christmas Eve. Dawn – Night

SCROOGE *stands in his counting house. Elegantly dressed in suit, cloak, bright waistcoat and top hat. Beaming brightly, he stands in a pose.*

SCROOGE Mr Cratchit!!!

CRATCHIT *snaps to attention.*

CRATCHIT Yessir Mr Scrooge sir.

SCROOGE Everything tickety-boo Mr Cratchit?

CRATCHIT Yes sir yes sir, everything tickety boo sir.

SCROOGE Splendid splendid splendid! So what are we tickety boo for *precisely* Mr Cratchit?

This is an old routine. Played out at Christmas time.
CRATCHIT *has to pretend he has forgotten.*

CRATCHIT Oh! Erm – what are we – er – tickety –

SCROOGE On this particular morning?

CRATCHIT On this er – particular er –

(scratches his head) Um – er –

SCROOGE *(sings)* 'Oh come let us adore mmm! Oh mmm mmm mmm mmm mmmmm mmm!'

CRATCHIT *(as if just getting it)* Oh yes! I know! Um – wait a minute!

SCROOGE Mmm mmm mmm mmm mmmm mm –

CRATCHIT Oh yes! Er – right – er –

SCROOGE Don't over-egg it Cratchit.

CRATCHIT Right sir. Sorry sir. Um –

SCROOGE Yes?

CRATCHIT *(tentatively)* Christmas Eve sir!

SCROOGE Sorry Cratchit? Didn't quite – catch it Cratchit?

They both laugh at **SCROOGE***'s verbal dexterity.*

CRATCHIT Christmas Eve sir!

SCROOGE CHRISTMAS EVE SIR!! Well remembered Mr. Cratchit! So – ready for our little diver-tis-ment?

CRATCHIT Oooo yes sir, yes sir. Ready for our div…er… tis…ismas

CRATCHIT *looks excited.* **SCROOGE** *grabs a cord.*

SCROOGE No peeking!

CRATCHIT *closes his eyes tight.* **SCROOGE** *pulls the cord. A garland drops down. It says 'A PROSPEROUS CHRISTMAS EVE TO OUR ALL ESTEEMED CUSTOMERS'.*

And open!

CRATCHIT *opens his eyes. He sees the garland. He applauds.*

(bows extravagantly) Thank you thank you thank you. Most kind! Most kind!

CRATCHIT I must say I do enjoy our little um –

SCROOGE Yes that's enough Cratchit.

CRATCHIT Sorry sir.

Door bell goes. They both jump. The pupetteers have sprung into action and have bought the door on – from now on they control the door as it comes on and off.

SCROOGE Ah! First customer Cratchit?

CRATCHIT *runs to desk, looks at a unwieldy ledger.*

CRATCHIT That's right sir. First customer sir. Six o'clock sir.

CRATCHIT *runs to the door.*

SCROOGE Clock Cratchit!

CRATCHIT *runs to the clock. Winds it to ten past six.*

CRATCHIT!!!

CRATCHIT *runs to phonograph. Clicks switch.*

MUSIC (PHONOGRAPH): WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

Enter!!!

CRATCHIT *runs to the door. Out of breath now. Opens it. Reveals* **MRS LACK**. *Shivering with cold and nerves. She throws snow over her head.*

CRATCHIT Mrs Lack sir.

SCROOGE Sorry?

CRATCHIT Mrs er Lack sir.

SCROOGE Mrs –

(takes this in) – Lack. My dear lady! Doo come in won't you please!

MRS LACK Thank you sir, thank you.

CRATCHIT *shuts door behind her.* **MRS LACK** *enters.*

SCROOGE Charming charming. *Charmant* as the French would say. Do sit down Mrs Lack. Take the lovely lovely comfy seat why don't you? Cratchit!

CRATCHIT *brings a chair.*

Sit Mrs Lack!

MRS LACK *sits. The chair is quite low.*

A little late Mrs Lack.

MRS LACK *(looks at clock, surprised)* Oh! I was sure it was –

SCROOGE Well we'll let it go this time but *do* try and keep your appointments Mrs Lack. Don't want any 'bad feeling' between us do we?

MRS LACK No sir. Right sir.

SCROOGE So where were we? Ah yes!

(beams) Carry on dear lady.

MRS LACK Well – um I was wondrin' might I'n bein' addressin' Mr Marley sir.

SCROOGE *(gasps with grief)* Mr Marley! Sadly no. Mr Marley is…no longer with us.

MRS LACK Erm –

SCROOGE He sings with the choir invisible.

MRS LACK Er –

SCROOGE He hath shuffled off this mortal coil.

MRS LACK Shuffled his what sir?

SCROOGE His final thread is spun.

MRS LACK Fred?

SCROOGE Thread Madam! He is dead!

MRS LACK Oh dear oh dear! I'm so sorry sir!

SCROOGE But a single year ago. To the day in fact. Nearly to the very hour.

(bigger sob) Such a dear dear dear friend.

CRATCHIT *brings a box of Victorian tissues to* **SCROOGE**. **SCROOGE** *blows his nose loudly. Hands*

used tissue back to **CRATCHIT**. **CRATCHIT** *folds it neatly and puts delicately back into the box.*

But the faceless executioner, the great leveller himself, comes to us all in his time, doth he not dear lady?

(bows deeply) Ebenezer Scrooge. At your service.

MRS LACK *(stands, curtsies)* Most honoured sir thankin' you sir.

SCROOGE Sit Mrs Lack.

MRS LACK *sits.*

So my dear lady, how may we assist?

MRS LACK Well sir – it's like this sir –

SCROOGE Take your time.

MRS LACK Thank you, thank you sir.

(takes breath) It's my husband sir you see sir. He's a good man sir, honest man sir. It's just – well there's no work sir and what with seven kiddies –

SCROOGE Seven what – sorry?

MRS LACK Kiddies sir!

SCROOGE Kiddies! Ah!

(chuckles knowingly) Bit of a handful eh?

MRS LACK Oh yes sir yes. And no food on the table sir and – what with it bein' Christmas sir and –

SCROOGE Did you say – Christmas?

MRS LACK Erm –

A signal to **CRATCHIT**. **CRATCHIT** *sets off phonograph.*

MUSIC (PHONOGRAPH): IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR.

MRS LACK *looks enchanted.*

SCROOGE A blessed time is it not Mrs Lack?

MRS LACK Oh yes indeed sir.

SCROOGE Yet costly too methinks!

MRS LACK Oh yes indeed indeed it is sir.

SCROOGE Indeed indeedy Mrs Lack.

He laughs merrily. **MRS LACK** *laughs,* **CRATCHIT** *laughs.*

So – might I suggest a little advance might not go amiss?

MRS LACK *(not sure what he means)* Sorry sir? Um – advance – er –

SCROOGE Lolly Mrs Lack!

MRS LACK Lolly? – erm –

SCROOGE Boodle –

MRS LACK Er –

He comes very close.

SCROOGE *MONEY my dear sweet lady!?*

MUSIC (PHONOGRAPH): WINDS DOWN.

MRS LACK I wasn't wishin' to presume sir!

(she stands and curtsies) But yes sir! Indeed sir!

SCROOGE Sit Mrs Lack!

MRS LACK *sits.*

MRS LACK Thank you thank you kindly sir!

SCROOGE Tis nothing madam. Tis the duty of our trade after all. Us financiers. To help all those in need. Tis our sacred purpose, is it not Mr Cratchit? So you see my dear lady you've come to the perfect person

for your predicament. And with any luck Mrs Lack you won't be Mrs 'lack' any more! And all your little 'kiddies' will have full little tummies.

He laughs merrily. **CRATCHIT** *laughs merrily.*

MRS LACK Oh sir! Oh sir!!

SCROOGE Mr Cratchit if you please. Follow us madam.

SCROOGE *and* **MRS LACK** *follow* **CRATCHIT** *into the Deposit room. Full of drawers and boxes. In the middle of the room is an enormous chest.* **SCROOGE** *takes a large jangling chain of keys from his waistcoat pocket. Finds the right key. Hands it to* **CRATCHIT**. **CRATCHIT** *reaches for it.*

Don't snatch it Cratchit!

He laughs merrily. They all laugh merrily.

CRATCHIT Sorry sir.

SCROOGE *gives him the key.* **CRATCHIT** *uses it to unlock another drawer which produces another key and so on – until finally the right key is revealed.* **SCROOGE** *uses this key to unlock the padlock.* **SCROOGE** *throws back the lid. A golden light shines out of the box.*

MUSIC: BARBASTELLA – 'BATMAN BEGINS' SOUNDTRACK.

MRS LACK *and* **CRATCHIT** *peer in and gasp.* **MRS LACK** *nearly faints at the sight.*

MRS LACK Oh my oh my sir!

SCROOGE So what shall we say Mrs Lack?

(takes out a pound) A pound?

MRS LACK *(gasping with amazement) A pound!* A pound would be just – oh sir –

SCROOGE *(holds up two pounds)* Or – two pounds?

MRS LACK *(overwhelmed)* Two!

SCROOGE Or – perhaps –

(he holds up the five pounds) – five pounds?

MRS LACK *(swooning)* FIVE!!! FIVE POUNDS SIR!!! Oh my! Oh my! Thank you sir thank you!

He proffers the coins to **MRS LACK** *who reaches eagerly for them. At the last moment, he clamps them in his fist.*

SCROOGE At what shall we say? One hundred percent?

MRS LACK *(bewildered)* One hun – um –

SCROOGE Forgive me, I'm sorry. Did I not make myself quite clear? I am referring to the interest madam.

MRS LACK Erm – sorry, inter – em sorry?

SCROOGE The IN-TER-EST Mrs Lack! I can hardly lend you five pounds for nothing. Can I Mr Cratchit?

CRATCHIT No sir no sir!

SCROOGE No no no sir!

(draws closer to **MRS LACK***)* All it is is this. It's really very simple. I lend you five shiny pounds from my big black box. You have all your lovely Christmas treats for all your little kiddies! You give me back – how much would Mrs Lack give me back Cratchit? CRATCHIT!!

CRATCHIT Five pounds sir.

SCROOGE Five pounds sir.

MRS LACK *(anxious)* Five pounds sir?

SCROOGE Exactement madame! Which on top of the five I loaned you comes to – er –

CRATCHIT Ten pounds.

SCROOGE In toto. Which you pay me –

(thinks about it) – in a week.

MRS LACK In a wee – Ten pounds!?? But HOW? WHEN!!?? How could I POSSIBLY –

SCROOGE Oh well I shouldn't really, I'm too generous, I'm a fool to myself – but seeing as it's Christmas – let's say – three months?

MRS LACK Three months! Oh thank you sir!

(kissing his hand) Thank you thank you thank you sir –

SCROOGE And the interest on that Mr Cratchit – give or take a penny or two – would be –

CRATCHIT Seventy-five pounds sir.

SCROOGE Speak up Cratchit!

CRATCHIT Seventy-five pounds sir!

SCROOGE *(loudly)* Seventy-five pounds sir!

MRS LACK *(gasping)* Seventy – five – in a – in a – in three – But I could never ever – Oh Mr Scrooge sir! Have a heart sir! I beg of 'ee sir!

SCROOGE Have a heart!!?? Have a HEART!!!??? Have a heart for those poor little starving kiddies Mrs Lack!!! Do you actually care Mrs Lack!? WHAT KIND OF MOTHER ARE YOU!!!!???

MRS LACK *looks racked.* **CRATCHIT** *looks racked.* **SCROOGE** *turns away.*

Oh well! Tried to help!

About to drop coins back in the box.

MRS LACK No no no no no sir!!! Please sir please sir please sir please sir!

SCROOGE *turns, magnanimously beaming.*

SCROOGE Splendid. *Splendide.* The three month option then? Excellent. So just a little tiny little signature if you'd be so kind. Thank you Mr Cratchit? QUICKLY!!

They all walk back into the front of the shop. **SCROOGE** *pushes* **MRS LACK** *back in her seat.* **CRATCHIT** *runs over with papers and quill.*

Just here please?

*(***MRS LACK** *scribbles,* **CRATCHIT** *reveals another paper)* And er – just here.

(she scribbles, another) And another little one.

(she scribbles) Thank you. And – er – here.

(she scribbles) And oh! One more just here.

(she scribbles faster) And – sorry! – another just here.

(even faster) And one more. Initial!

(even faster) Initial!

(faster) Full signature!

(faster) Initial!

(faster) Initial!

(faster) Initial!

(faster) Initial!

(faster) Full signature!

(faster) Full!

(faster) Initial!

(faster) Full!

(faster) Initial!

(faster) Full!

(faster) Initial!

(faster) Full!

(faster) Initial!

(faster) And another full signature there.

(faster) And the last one!

(faster) And one more. *Quickly!* And one more!

(scribbles last signature) Thank you!!! Thank you Cratchit.

CRATCHIT *whisks away the papers.* **SCROOGE** *holds the coins up.*

So Mrs Lack! Five lovely jubbly poundies. To you madam.

He drops them one at a time into her palm.

There. That wasn't too painful was it?

The door appears. **SCROOGE** *opens the door for* **MRS LACK** *and shoves her out.*

Good day to you Mrs. Lack.

MRS LACK *throws snow over her head. Exits hurriedly. The door retreats. The door returns.*

The shop door-bell clangs.

FREDERICK, **SCROOGE***'s nephew, enters. He throws snow over himself.*

Quick quick quick! Another customer! Hurry Cratchit! Cratchit! Cratchit! Cratchit! Cratchit!

CRATCHIT *runs to the phonograph. Turns it back on.*

SCROOGE *preens. Turns back beaming.*

Doooo come in why don't you? And to whom do I have the –

CRATCHIT It is not a new customer sir! It is your nephew Frederick!

SCROOGE *freezes.*

SCROOGE I know who it is Cratchit!

FREDERICK My dear uncle Scrooge!

SCROOGE My dear nephew Frederick. And what can I do for you sir?

FREDERICK You know what you can do for me sir!

(gives **CRATCHIT** *his hat)* Thank you Mr Cratchit. You can accept my invitation to Christmas dinner sir. Which I most heartily invite you to every year sir. To share Christmas Day with myself, my wife Constance, and my family sir.

SCROOGE And the reply sir is the same as it is every year sir. No sir. Thank ye for the invitation sir. I have no wish to share Christmas with anyone. Least of all yourself or your – *wretched family sir!* Good day to thee sir!

(turns away. Turns back) Have you not left sir?

FREDERICK But why sir?

SCROOGE Why what sir?

FREDERICK Will you not come sir?

SCROOGE Because dear nephew – as I inform you every tedious year sir – I veritably, utterly and indubitably HATE CHRISTMAS!!!

FREDERICK So what is all this uncle?

(indicates banner) – and this uncle?

(indicates phonogram) A Christmas carol unless I am mistaken! Christmas cheer is it not!

He winds up the phonograph.

MUSIC (PHONOGRAPH): WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

SCROOGE *snaps off the phonograph.*

MUSIC (PHONOGRAPH): CUT.

SCROOGE Nothing of the sort sir, I'm sorry to disappoint you! This sir is the latest 'thing' in business if you wish to know sir and that is all it is. 'Tis remarkably efficacious in separating credulous fools from their money and maximising profits. What do we call it Cratchit?

CRATCHIT 'Marketing' sir.

SCROOGE 'Marketing' sir. Not half clever eh? One day it will rule the world.

SCROOGE *chuckles.* **CRATCHIT** *chuckles uneasily.*

But on no account allow its dreadful jollity to deceive you dear nephew. Tis all tinsel falsity, and means nothing sir. Like Christmas itself sir! Which you are welcome to! Good morrow sir and good riddance. Hat Cratchit! Door Cratchit!

CRATCHIT Yes sir!

CRATCHIT *collects* **FREDERICK***'s hat, summons the door. The door returns.* **CRATCHIT** *opens it. He waits, shivering, holding out* **FREDERICK***'s hat.* **FREDERICK** *marches to the door. Instead of leaving, he closes the door. The door retreats.*

SCROOGE I said DOOR Cratchit!

CRATCHIT Yes sir!

CRATCHIT *summons the door. The door returns.* **CRATCHIT** *holds out* **FREDERICK***'s hat. Shivers at the door.* **FREDERICK** *does not move. Sends the door away.*

FREDERICK Sorry Mr Cratchit.

The door retreats.

SCROOGE Did ye not hear me Cratchit!?

CRATCHIT *summons the door. The door returns.*

CRATCHIT *(to* **FREDERICK***)* Sorry sir.

FREDERICK *sends the door away. The door retreats.*

FREDERICK *(to* **CRATCHIT***)* Sorry sir.

SCROOGE I said did ye not hear me Cratchit!!

CRATCHIT *freezes in terror. Caught between the two.*

FREDERICK And will ye not hear *ME* sir! A Christmas feast uncle! A roaring fire sir! A fine plump turkey sir! Chestnut stuffing! Roast potatoes! Cranberry sauce, brussel sprouts and gravy sir!

CRATCHIT *listens yearningly.*

CRATCHIT Graaaaavy!!!

SCROOGE Gruel sir!!!!

FREDERICK No sir no! A true Christmas table uncle! All alight with smiling faces! Joy on every countenance! Music and dancing and –

SCROOGE – and pathetic paltry parlour games I should imagine sir!!!

FREDERICK Yes uncle yes! All manner of games sir! O uncle dearest uncle!! What *IS* it about Christmas uncle makes you so unhappy!?

SCROOGE Christmas sir is a fraud sir! A sham sir! A fake sir! Just like this – paper *chain* sir!

(he rips down the banner) What is the excellently expressive and – if I may say so – hilarious word I use for 'Christmas' Cratchit? Cratchit!!

CRATCHIT *(inaudible)* Humbug sir.

SCROOGE Louder sir!

CRATCHIT *(a little louder)* Humbug sir.

SCROOGE Louder!

CRATCHIT Humbug sir!!

SCROOGE LOUDER!!

CRATCHIT HUMBUG SIR!!!

SCROOGE HUMBUG SIR!!!

FREDERICK No sir! Not Humbug sir!! Tis the opposite sir! Tis an honest time sir! A merry time sir! Full of cheer and goodness! When all the world is good and glad sir!

SCROOGE Cheer! Glad! Good! Honest! Merry! Yukkkkk! If I could work my will nephew, every buffoon who wastes his hours of righteous toil spreading Christmas cheer to all and sundry, would be boiled with his own Christmas pudding and buried in his grave with a stake of Christmas holly through his heart!

FREDERICK I cannot believe uncle – that *somewhere* inside you, resides not a memory – a tiny spark of light glowing in your heart – when Christmas was a goodly time to you too sir! When you could say with an open heart, with all the world, God bless it everyone!

CRATCHIT *(applauds)* God bless it every one sir!

SCROOGE CRATCHIT!

CRATCHIT *freezes.*

One more sound from you Cratchit and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your blessed situation sir! I can snuff you out Cratchit. Like a candle Cratchit. Or a moth Cratchit. Just like –

(clicks fingers) – that Cratchit!

CRATCHIT Yes Sir.

FREDERICK Dear uncle –

SCROOGE WHAT!!!?

FREDERICK Come for my mother then!

SCROOGE *starts.*

For thy dear sister's sake! For Fran.

SCROOGE My sister sir!!!? My sister is gone sir! Long gone and forgotten sir! I think thine ears are sealed sir!! Nothing will induce me to come, sir! NOTHING!!!

FREDERICK But my wife sir! My darling Constance! My children! They long to meet you sir!

SCROOGE No-one longs to meet me sir! NOW BE GONE SIR!!!

FREDERICK This shell that entombs thee uncle! Like a dark cave sir! Why sir – why – why –

SCROOGE WHY DID YOU GET MARRIED SIR?

All freeze. **CRATCHIT** *freezes.* **SCROOGE** *freezes.*

FREDERICK What?

SCROOGE What?

FREDERICK Why did I get –

SCROOGE Nothing sir!

FREDERICK Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE Love!? Ha! LOVE!!??

The shop door bell clangs.

All freeze. **CRATCHIT** *rushes to the oncoming door. Opens it to see who it is – then promptly closes it – much to the* **BENTHAM***'s dismay.*

CRATCHIT Two ladies sir!

SCROOGE Ladies!!? *Ladies!!?* Quickly Cratchit quickly!

CRATCHIT *winds the phonograph.* **SCROOGE** *plumps his tie, flounces his hair, smooths his eyebrows.*

MUSIC (PHONOGRAPH): JOY TO THE WORLD.

FREDERICK *stands there, as they run round him.* **CRATCHIT** *finally opens the door. Reveal* **LAVINIA** *and* **HERMIONE BENTHAM**. *They throw snow over their heads.* **SCROOGE** *switches on his instant smile.*

My dear ladies! Doooo come in if you would please!

The ladies enter. **CRATCHIT** *shuts the door. Sends it away.*

LAVINIA & HERMIONE Thank you sir most kindly sir.

SCROOGE Coats Cratchit!

CRATCHIT, *still clutching his book, takes their coats.*

LAVINIA *(to* **FREDERICK***)* And to whom do we have the honour

Mr Marley or Mr Scrooge sir?

SCROOGE *(steps in front of* **FREDERICK**, *bows)* Ebenezer Scrooge at your service ladies. Mr Marley sadly…

(stifled sob) …is no longer…

(bigger sob) …forgive me…

(giant sob) …a year ago to the day…

CRATCHIT *passes the tissue.* **SCROOGE** *prepares to take it.*

HERMIONE BENTHAM My dear dear dear Mr Scrooge sir!

SCROOGE *switches off his sad face puts on his bright face and* **CRATCHIT** *puts away the tissue.*

SCROOGE So anyway ladies or – as the French would say – *mesdames*, let us –

(he brightens) – cut to the chase shall we?

LAVINIA The – er – chase?

SCROOGE A little Christmas loan perhaps? Cratchit!

CRATCHIT *picks up loan papers and quill. Also juggles the appointments diary and the coats. Re-winds the phonograph.*

HERMIONE A loan?

SCROOGE Or –

(beaming) – two possibly? Two little Christmas loans perhaps?

HERMIONE No no no sir. You mistake our purpose. We come for your charity sir.

MUSIC (PHONOGRAPH): WINDS DOWN.

SCROOGE *stops beaming.*

SCROOGE My what?

LAVINIA For the poor, the needy, the destitute, all who suffer at this Christmas tide.

SCROOGE Are there no prisons?

HERMIONE Prisons?

SCROOGE Or workhouses? Are the Treadmill and the Poor Law not in full vigour?

HERMIONE They are indeed sir. I wish I could say they were not.

LAVINIA So – what may we put you down for?

SCROOGE Down for?

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