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SF PERUSALS

A Christmas Carol

Based on the Book by
Charles Dickens

by Michael Paller

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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ISBN 978-0-573-60760-8 Printed in U.S.A. #5100

A CHRISTMAS CAROL was originally produced by Center Repertory Theatre of Cleveland. The production was directed by Thomas Q. Fulton, Jr., with sets and lighting designed by James Merrill Stone and costumes designed by Mark Passerell. Musical supervisor was Michael Griffith. The production opened December 8th, 1978, with the following cast:

MARK LEMON ..... *Robert Snook*

FREDERICK DICKENS ..... *Bradley Boyer*

CLARKSON STANFIELD ..... *David Willis*

HELEN HOGARTH ..... *Maureen Pedala*

CHARLEY DICKENS ..... *Jeff Granger*

MRS. STANFIELD ..... *Mary Ann Nagel*

CATHERINE DICKENS ..... *Margaret Heffernan*

CHARLES DICKENS ..... *Thomas Q. Fulton, Jr.*

JOHN FORSTER ..... *Gary Bodiford*

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

CHARLES DICKENS—Tall, slim, seldom standing still; a dynamo of energy with a mesmerizing voice. In his early thirties, he is already near the height of his powers.

THE CHILD—Ten years old. Dressed in shades of grey and black.

MARK LEMON—Editor of "Punch" magazine, the humorous weekly. He is advancing toward middle age and corpulence.

FREDERICK DICKENS—The younger brother of CHARLES DICKENS. Twenty-three, he is something of a ne'er-do-well, the charming variety.

CLARKSON STANFIELD—The painter. About thirty-two, there is a quality about him that is, at once, mischievous yet gentle.

HELEN HOGARTH—The ten-year old niece of CHARLES DICKENS.

CHARLEY DICKENS—CHARLES DICKENS' son, also about ten.

MRS. STANFIELD—Wife of STANFIELD. In her early thirties, she is small and delicately featured, with the most amazing pair of dancing eyes.

CATHERINE DICKENS—Wife of CHARLES DICKENS. She is also in her late twenties or early thirties. A taller woman than MRS. STANFIELD, her beauty is of a sturdier sort.

JOHN FORSTER—DICKENS' closest friend and advisor. Also in his thirties, he is in many ways the opposite of DICKENS: Though given to occasional fits of joviality, he is more by nature gruff and taciturn.

The time is Christmas Eve, 1843.
The place is the attic of the home of Charles Dickens in London.

WHO PLAYS WHO

DICKENS—SCROOGE

CHARLEY—A CAROLLER, YOUNG EBENEZER, A LITTLE FEZZIWIG, TINY TIM, THE BOY

HELEN—A CAROLLER, FAN, A LITTLE FEZZIWIG, BELINDA CRATCHIT

STANFIELD—BOB CRATCHIT, THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST, TOPPER, THE THIN MAN, THE UNDERTAKER

MRS. STANFIELD—BELLE, MARTHA CRATCHIT, MRS. FRED'S SISTER, THE CHARWOMAN

CATHERINE DICKENS—MRS. FEZZIWIG, MRS. CRATCHIT, MRS. FRED, MRS. DILBER

FREDERICK DICKENS—FRED, YOUNG SCROOGE, PETER CRATCHIT, GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME (I), OLD JOE

JOHN FORSTER—SECOND PORTLY GENTLEMAN, GHOST OF JACOB MARLEY, DICK WILKINS, GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT, MAN WITH THE HANDKERCHIEF, GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME (II)

MARK LEMON—FIRST PORTLY GENTLEMAN, FEZZIWIG, FAT MAN, MAN ON THE BED

THE CHILD

A Christmas Carol

PROLOGUE

The set has three levels. The first level, which in terms of playing space, is the largest; the second, which is about six or so inches higher, is smaller in area; the third is a round turret, with steps leading down to the second level. The room is a third story attic. It is as clean as any other room in the house, as its owner often spends his day there. The main entrance to the room is a door on the turret. Through this door one may enter from the lower floors of the house. The turret is Up Left. Up Right, in the Right wall, is a smaller door to a smaller storage room. Just down of this door is a fireplace with fire irons and a wood box. In the center of the rear wall is a large window, and a window seat which opens up for storage. Right of the window, set into the wall, are bookshelves. Downstage, on the first level, is a writing desk and chair. To the Right, also Downstage, is a couch, or chaise longue. Downstage of the chaise longue, on the edge of the stage, is a window which we cannot see. Center, on the second level, is a large, humpbacked trunk. There are a few other chairs, scattered about. A large gas lamp hangs from the ceiling over the center of the room; hurricane lamps and candles are on brackets on the walls and on the mantle; also there is a candle and candlestick on the writing desk. On the turret wall is a set of bells connected to the floors below for communication purposes (and can be rung Offstage). Atop the room are rafters, through which we can see the sky. A lecturn stands to the Left of the turret.

The house belongs to one CHARLES DICKENS. *It is noon, December 24th, 1843, in London.*

CHARLES DICKENS, *a tall, powerfully built man with a moustache, and a beard on his chin (which, I confess, he did not have in 1843), sits at his desk, trying to write. He is disturbed by the sounds of carollers' voices, which float into the room through the window, which is slightly ajar. Angered by the distraction, he throws down his pen, goes to the window, and shuts it. He returns to the desk, picks up his pen, and writes one more word.*

DICKENS. (*Writing.*) "Autobiography." (*He puts down the pen, and reads what he's written this morning.*) These, then are the facts. When I was ten, my father was declared a bankrupt, and was incarcerated in Marshalsea, the debtors' prison. His creditors determined that some member of our family had to earn wages. So, I was taken away, and placed in a damp, lightless factory, where they manufactured boot-blacking. For twelve hours a day, I pasted labels on blacking jars. I was diligent in my work, and tried not to hear the incessant scurry beneath the floorboards. Or I would close my eyes, and pretend that it was rain on the window, and that I was safely home in bed. But when the noises began running squealing between my legs, even an imagination as resolute as mine could not make of them anything but what they were. (*He crosses out the next few words, and continues.*) Some days, the owner would set me in a large window, and people would stop to admire the little man at work. This would usually occur around midday, when the streets were full. Later, the owner—a cousin of mine—would happily report that my performance was responsible for the immediate and large purchases made by the lunch hour crowds. To a boy whose world was bound by sunlight and a lazy blue river, this descent into meanness and filth seemed like the end of life. My companions were

street urchins, who had little sympathy for a boy who knew how to read—and liked to. I was totally friendless. I spoke to no one, except at night, when I visited my father in his cell. I wanted him to know the misery of my existence . . . (*He pauses, thinking how to procede. It should be mentioned that, although the time of day is noon, the room is dark. Only those parts of the room that are currently in play are lit. As other parts of the room come into play, they, too, are lit. During the PROLOGUE, the room is never bright. At present, all we see is* DICKENS *at his desk. Now, from out of the darkness, comes a small hand reaching across the desk. We begin to see that it belongs to a* CHILD *about ten years old.* THE CHILD *takes the paper* DICKENS *has been reading from, and crumples it. He—for it is a boy, dressed in simple shirt and pants of a poor London boy of the 1820's—crosses to the fireplace and tosses the paper in. He turns and faces* DICKENS.) You are a most disagreeable child.

THE CHILD. (*Shrugging his shoulders.*) Yes.

DICKENS. Listen. I wrote this this morning. (*He takes another sheet of paper and begins to read aloud. As he does,* THE CHILD *wanders Upstage, takes some books from the shelves, riffles through the pages, and drops them on the floor. His attention is then drawn to the trunk. He crosses to it, opens it, and begins examining its contents.*) I am a grown man. Or as grown a man as any writer comes to be. But more and more, I find that I must answer to the whims of a little boy. Now and then he comes to me during the day as I work. (*He pauses, as a book hits the floor.*) Listen. This is about you. (*He goes back to the manuscript.*) Most of the time, he comes for me at night. And though I am a man and he is only a boy, he compels me, by some power, to follow him. He guides me down ill-lit, constricted streets, until I can smell the river. I know where he is leading me, and I stop, as a dark structure rears up out of the night. "No!" I say. "I would follow you if I could, but I haven't

the power." I turn and flee, back up the twisted lanes, up away from the river. I push my way through a noisy crowd, and see the faces of friends and relations long dead. I shout to them, but they have no consciousness of me. I'm carried along until I find myself in a mean little street in the Camdentown slum. Before me is a tumbledown pawnshop. Three grotesque creatures are bickering with the proprietor—(*He stops because* THE CHILD *is now banging loudly on a toy drum he has taken from the trunk.* DICKENS *stands.* THE CHILD *stops his banging. A pause, while their eyes meet.* DICKENS *sighs, crumples the paper, and tosses it to* THE CHILD, *who takes it to the fireplace and throws it in.*) I'm trying to reach an accomodation. Look. (*He crosses to the chaise longue and takes from under it an old box. He opens it.*) I found these last night, rummaging about. (*From the box, he takes some old toys: a wooden soldier whose arms and legs move with the pull of a string; a tumbler who rolls about; a frog made of Plaster-of-Paris.*) Don't you recognize them?

THE CHILD. (*Crossing to the desk, he sits and looks through a stack of manuscript.*) No.

DICKENS. They're Christmas toys, you old goat. For all his faults, John Dickens knew how to choose a Christmas gift. Come see. (*He offers one to* THE CHILD.) They're yours, too.

THE CHILD. (*Reading from a page of manuscript.*) "Despite our poverty, the spirit of Christmas filled our poor house like a living giant." (*He crumples the paper.*)

DICKENS. (*Trying not to be annoyed.*) I can't seem to come up with anything that pleases you. (THE CHILD *crosses to the fireplace and throws the paper in.*) Can't we be at peace? It doesn't become a man to war with children. (*He crosses to* THE CHILD, *who counters by crossing back to the desk.*)

THE CHILD. They're a trap.

DICKENS. What?

THE CHILD. The toys.

DICKENS. No they're not. (*A pause.*) Yes they are. Of sorts. I simply want to make you a part of me again. (*He holds out his hand.*) Won't you come to me?

THE CHILD. No.

DICKENS. What would you like me to do?

THE CHILD. (*Thinking.*) Stand on your head.

DICKENS. I will not stand on my head.

THE CHILD. Sing a Christmas song, then.

DICKENS. (*Not pleased.*) Very well. (*He sings the first few lines of "Come, All Ye Faithful," until* THE CHILD *begins to laugh.*) This is ridiculous. (THE CHILD *breaks the point off a quill. Then, he breaks another.*) It isn't enough that you haunt me, is it? (THE CHILD *jumps from the chair and crosses to the window seat. He looks out the window.*) You simply must defy me, as well. (*No response from* THE CHILD.) I know that I've not always used you well, that I've blamed you for faults which are my own. And I've behaved bitterly toward you. I admit that, too. But not any more.

THE CHILD. (*Looking out the window.*) There's a man with a goose downstairs.

DICKENS. Yes, we're having a Christmas Eve party tonight.

THE CHILD. He has another goose.

DICKENS. A sure sign that Mark Lemon will be here. And that's one more reason why I wish you'd be more . . . attentive. (*From a desk drawer he takes a stack of bills.*) Goose is not inexpensive. Neither is clothing. Nor coal. Nor paper. Nor . . . quills. And I can't get any amount of work done with you laying so unproductively on every thought.

THE CHILD. (*Unimpressed, he crosses to the trunk, and takes from it a violin and bow.*) Do you think he has to work tonight?

DICKENS. Who?

THE CHILD. The goose man.

DICKENS. Probably.

THE CHILD. Must have a nasty boss, making him work on Christmas Eve.

DICKENS. Don't play with that. (*He takes the instrument from* THE CHILD. *On second thought, he hands it back.*) The fact that I've resorted to putting it all down on paper says something. (*Leafing through the manuscript.*)

THE CHILD. (*Plucking the strings and drawing the bow across them.*) I wanted to take music lessons.

DICKENS. Yes, it would have been nice. (*Looking at a particular page.*) Did you know about the girl I was in love with when I was eighteen?

THE CHILD. No.

DICKENS. She was quite pretty. Yes, she was. Of course, she was very frivolous, too, but—

THE CHILD. (*Takes a crutch from the trunk, and with great energy, hops across the floor.*) Who am I?

DICKENS. I don't know.

THE CHILD. Guess.

DICKENS. The Queen's Color Guard.

THE CHILD. No.

DICKENS. I give up.

THE CHILD. The boy with the crutch.

DICKENS. Ah. Well, you're much too clever for me.

THE CHILD. From the factory. The boy with the crutch.

DICKENS. What boy with a crutch? I don't remember anyone like that.

THE CHILD. That's because there wasn't any.

DICKENS. Of course there wasn't. (*But he's intrigued.*) But what if there were? What if there were a boy with a crutch? Would he in fact be able to work? His family would have to be in a bad situation to even consider it. What about his brothers and sisters? (THE CHILD *goes to the window and opens it. Again, the sound of the carollers wafts in. The stage begins to darken, until all we see is* DICKENS.) They'd have to put in long hours at some menial labor to bring

home even five and sixpence weekly. And the father? A laborer, or a clerk, perhaps . . . with an old pinchfist of an employer opposed on principle to paying a living wage . . . (*He turns and looks for* THE CHILD, *who has vanished in the darkness.*) What the devil . . . (*Back to the new thought.*) And what if this employer had a partner . . . (*The lights fade as he continues to speak.*)

ACT ONE

Christmas Eve. The room is dark, except for a shaft of moonlight shining through the window. The singing voices have grown louder; they are now coming from downstairs. There is a burst of laughter, followed by renewed singing. A scrambling, huffing, and puffing is heard on the stairs, and MARK LEMON *bursts into the room, as if squeezed out of the narrow stairway.* LEMON *is close to middle age, balding on top but well-whiskered on the sides, and given to corpulence. There is a great deal of child about him still, as befits the first editor of "Punch," the humor magazine. The Dickens family has nicknamed this sleek, round gentleman "Uncle Porpoise."*

Currently, he is something other than jovial. He's just been chased up two flights of stairs, the last considerably narrower than he. He pauses on the turret, and after a moment, spies a candle on DICKENS' *desk. He gropes his way toward it, barking his shins on the trunk.*

LEMON. Merry Christmas indeed, Charles Dickens! (*Limping his way to the desk, he strikes a match and lights the candle.*) If our Savior had known we would be celebrating his eighteen hundred and forty-third birthday in such a fasion, he'd have returned and put an end to things long ago. (*Seeing the trunk, and sitting on it.*) It was you who confounded my shins, was it?

(*There is another clamor on the steps, singing and laughing.* FREDERICK DICKENS, *the 23 year-old ne'er-do-well brother of* CHARLES, *enters, carrying* CHARLEY, DICKENS' *young son on his shoulders. He is followed*

by the artist CLARKSON STANFIELD, *who is 32, and bearing* DICKENS' *niece,* HELEN HOGARTH, *on his shoulders.* FREDERICK *is long and lanky, with sandy red hair.* STANFIELD *is a bit shorter, wiry, and dark-haired. The children have draped their mounts with much Christmas trimming.* HELEN *also carries a box of it. As they speak, the four of them drape the room in garlands, wreaths, pine cones, etc.*)

FREDERICK. Heigh-ho, Uncle Porpoise!

STANFIELD. I've never seen any man run so.

FREDERICK. Never seen so large a man run so, you mean.

STANFIELD. (*Putting* HELEN *down.*) Off you go, about your work.

LEMON. Work?

HELEN. Uncle Boz told us to trim the room like a tree.

CHARLEY. "Do it up proper," he said, "or I'll show you how."

LEMON. He's gone mad.

(HELEN *and* CHARLEY, *who is off* FREDERICK's *shoulders at this point, continue dressing up the room.*)

FREDERICK. He *is* excited.

STANFIELD. You excited him, Mark Lemon.

CHARLEY. (*Correcting him.*) "Uncle Porpoise!"

LEMON. (*Taking hard candy from a vest pocket, and tossing some to the children.*) I only suggested he tell us a Christmas story. And, as it is Christmas Eve, I think that's a thoroughly proper and reasonable request. Next thing I know, he's chasing me about with a broomstick, bellowing, "Up the stairs, to the attic with you!"

STANFIELD. You cut quite a figure—and quite a path, too. You tumbled every vase in the vicinity, I think.

FREDERICK. The retreat you beat up those stairs was hilarious—as funny as anything I've seen in your magazine

for years. But I think you've inflicted grave injury on that last flight of stairs. They were groaning in considerable pain when we came up. (*The last candle is lit at this point.*)

LEMON. Christmas has driven him mad. The most famous writer in England—I think we're entitled to a story.

STANFIELD. He absolutely refuses.

FREDERICK. He is adamant.

STANFIELD. He's got something up his sleeve, the old magician.

LEMON. The old murderer, you mean. I nearly broke my legs over this trunk.

FREDERICK. Oh, that's the theatrical trunk. For the costumes, and so on. You've never seen our theatricals, have you, Uncle Porpoise? Stanny here paints the scenery, you know—and acts, as well.

STANFIELD. They're a smashing piece of fun. Dickens chooses the plays, rehearses us night and day for a month, and we take 'em out for charity. We've all of us done 'em. Even the children.

FREDERICK. Sometimes they're the best of us all. It's their imaginations, I think.

HELEN. No it's not. It's our talent.

FREDERICK. That modest estimation proves she's a Dickens, if only by marriage. Forster does 'em, too.

LEMON. No. Forster? I can't imagine a man with the social amenities of a porcupine painting his face and frisking across a stage. He kills daisies with a stare. It's his hobby, you know.

FREDERICK. We've raised hundreds for the childrens' hospitals.

LEMON. That trunk very nearly landed me in hospital.

FREDERICK. You should see him work. His energy is extraordinary. Between driving us like slaves and taking the principle role himself, one would swear he's possessed by demons.

DICKENS. (*Off.*) Up, up with you!

LEMON. Good God, he's driving the women up, too!

(CATHERINE *and* MRS. STANFIELD *enter.* CATHERINE, *a handsome woman in her early thirties, is a sturdy Victorian mother.* MRS. STANFIELD *is bubbling innocence personified.* CATHERINE *is maneuvering a large brimming punch bowl, while* MRS. STANFIELD *carries a tray of glasses.* LEMON *immediately goes to the aid of* CATHERINE, *while* FREDERICK *assists* MRS. STANFIELD. STANFIELD *is looking through the contents of the trunk.*)

MRS. STANFIELD. (*Out of breath.*) I don't know how we've done it, but we haven't spilled a drop.

CATHERINE. He'd have our heads if we did. He insists we have the punch.

FREDERICK. Bravo, ladies, remarkable feat! (*Having helped* MRS. STANFIELD, *he exits into the small room Off Right, for a reconnaissance.*)

MRS. STANFIELD. I think it's an accomplishment, to be chased 'round a table and up two flights of stairs carrying a full bowl of punch, and not spilling a drop. What could he be thinking?

FREDERICK. (*Reentering with a horse collar connected to several chains.*) Something outrageous, I'm quite confident.

LEMON. My goodness, he takes this slave business seriously, doesn't he?

FREDERICK. (*Putting the collar on* LEMON.) Yes, and I think it's just your size, too.

LEMON. (*Quickly evading the collar.*) Fortunately, my dear Frederick—and, as you would be the first to point out—these days, I can find very little that *is* my size.

CATHERINE. Well, if this is any indication, I'm certain

we'll need to fortify ourselves for whatever it is he has in mind. Have some punch.

STANFIELD. (*Taking the violin and bow from the trunk.*) Look at this, my dear. A serenade!

MRS. STANFIELD. Oh, Stanny. Please not a seranade.

STANFIELD. (*Tuning.*) And why not? I'm quite handy with a fiddle and bow.

MRS. STANFIELD. (*She playfully takes the bow from him. As she speaks,* STANFIELD *makes a valiant attempt to regain it.*) I know several cats who would disagree. (*To the others.*) Stanny played the violin for a week beneath my window before I agreed to marry him, and only under the strictest condition that he give up music and swear fidelity to his artist's brush.

STANFIELD. (*Still chasing after the bow.*) Nonsense. We agreed only that I not play beneath your window, and I haven't. (*He's got it back.*) As for the alley cats—well, they obviously recognized in the strings of my instrument a long lost cousin, and were understandably shaken. (*He turns his back on* MRS. STANFIELD, *and announces:*) Now then, ladies and gents, "The Christmas Child." (*He raises his bow to the violin. As he's about to strike the first note,* MRS. STANFIELD *tickles him from behind. This surprise attack propels him in the direction of* CATHERINE, *and he now has his back to her.*) Narrow-minded critic! (CATHERINE *covers his eyes from behind.*) I say! Everything's gone dark! (*He leaps onto the chaise longue.*) Muses protect me! All the marshalled forces of Christendom shall not prevent me from being heard! Ladies and gents, "The Christmas Child!" (*He raises the bow and is about to strike the first note when a loud crash is heard downstairs.*)

LEMON. Good heavens, what is that man up to?

CHARLEY. (*Meaning the decorations.*) There, Uncle Porpoise. Does it look like Christmas?

LEMON. It's superb, Charley. All it lacks is a tree.

DICKENS. (*Beginning Off, we hear deep, mysterious tones. Midway through the verse, he enters. Or, rather, some being, possibly human, piled high with household items, wrapped Christmas gifts, and a coat rack, festooned with various bits of costume, enters. One prominent appendage is a large branch cut from a Christmas tree and stuck, with some earth, in a pot. He has a black, hooded robe over his clothes.*)

"We three kings of Orient are
bearing gifts we've travelled afar.
Field and fountain,
moor and mountain,
following yonder star."

(*He sets down the coat rack, and points a finger at* CHARLEY.)

Child, which way to the East?

LEMON. Good God.

CATHERINE. What have you done to the tree, Charles?

DICKENS. It insisted I bring some of it upstairs. "Take a bough!" it said! "I don't want to be left out. I've plenty more and won't miss it a minute. You'll have it back in me by Christmas morning, and I'll never know the difference!"

FREDERICK. What is all this?

DICKENS. I've seen a vision. A miser's bed . . . (*From his collection he pulls a sheet, and throws it onto the couch, practically covering* LEMON.)

LEMON. I say!

DICKENS. . . . a boy with a crutch . . . (*He tosses* CHARLEY *the crutch.*)

STANFIELD. He busted the broomstick!

DICKENS. . . . a man wrapped in chains! Stunning, brilliant idea! (*He examines the faces in the room.*) The one who's missing will be here directly. And won't he be in a temper! (*Crossing to the downstage window, gazing out.*) The night is folding itself around us. Come look! The

moonlight fades as the fog slides in. It's freezing, thawing, snivelling. The pavement's greasy with the damp; nothing can stand in the street, and nobody can quite fall.

LEMON. A good night to be in doors. By a fire. In the parlour.

DICKENS. I'd quite forgotten. I apologize. Fred! By all means, a fire!

FREDERICK. Right! (FREDERICK *builds a fire in the fireplace.*)

DICKENS. We can't very well have a Christmas story without a fire blazing.

MRS. STANFIELD. So it *is* a story.

CATHERINE. You needn't put us through all of this for the sake of a story. You could have told it as easily in the parlour.

STANFIELD. No, don't be silly. I have it. He wants to tell it here, where he writes—to be "inspired" by the atmosphere.

(*A general clamor, as they debate the necessity of moving the entire party upstairs.*)

DICKENS. Peace, peace! This is Christmas Eve. It's my work telling stories. Surely you don't suggest a man work upon Christmas Eve? No, I've something else in mind. (*The bells on the wall jangle.*) He's here—my man in chains. I want everyone to greet him with a hearty "Merry Christmas, John!" But first, be prepared for a blow, batten down the hatches! Hide! (*They do so. Some exit into the room Off Right,* STANFIELD *lifts* HELEN *into the trunk and shuts the lid, one hides behind the chaise.* LEMON *stays where he is, on the chaise.*) Submerge yourself, Uncle Porpoise!

(LEMON *covers himself with the blanket.* DICKENS *turns down the gas lamp, and hides by the corner of the stairway, the hood of the cloak draped over his head. A*

pause. A sound of footsteps on the stairs. JOHN FORSTER *enters. He is* DICKENS' *closest friend, a literary critic and editor whose temper is infamous. For* FORSTER, *it is an effort to look anything but grim and disagreeable. He is irritated and somewhat confused, for upon arrival he has been told by the maid that the party has been moved to the attic. He pauses on the turret, letting his eyes adjust to the darkness.*)

FORSTER. Hello? Dickens? (*He comes down the stairs, and straight down front.* DICKENS *follows from behind, and points a cloaked arm at* FORSTER.) Anybody here?

DICKENS. (*Deeply, mysteriously.*) Merry Christmas, John. (FORSTER *jumps in fright, as* EVERYONE *bursts into view with:*)

EVERYONE. Merry Christmas, John!

FORSTER. (*To* DICKENS.) You lunatic. An explanation at once.

DICKENS. (*Putting the gas lamp back on.*) Gentle Forster, meek and mild! Merry Christmas!

HELEN. (*Standing in the trunk.*) I don't see any chains.

FORSTER. Chains? What's she talking about?

DICKENS. Ladies and gentlemen, my good, most understanding friend, Mister John Forster. You know everyone, Forster? I don't believe you've met my niece, Helen.

FORSTER. No. (*Children do not impress him.*) Merry Christmas.

CATHERINE. (*Holding out her hand.*) Merry Christmas, John.

FORSTER. (*Kissing it.*) Yes, yes. Now, will you explain why we're celebrating this auspicious night in such an unorthodox, uncomfortable, and odious little room?

STANFIELD. It's simple. Uncle Porpoise here suggested that Dickens tell us a Christmas tale, and instead of sitting us round the fire, he's herded us all upstairs.

FORSTER. You asked Dickens to tell a story? And he re-

fused? Don't stand there, man, fetch a doctor. He's unmistakably ill.

DICKENS. (*Enjoying it all.*) No, no; I'm as healthy as the good day itself. And I'd be as glad of a Christmas story as you'd be. But if there's a worse sin than working upon Christmas Eve, it's one man doing all the work while the rest sink back and savor his industry. No. If we're to have a story, let us each take a part in its telling. Everything we need for a tale of Christmas is in this room. (*He throws open the trunk.*) The costumes and properties of Dickens' Theatricals! (*He takes off the cloak.*)

FREDERICK. I say, this could be fun.

DICKENS. It will be glorious. Place yourselves in my hands. We'll bring forth the most marvelous of Christmas spirits. Now, for the roles . . .

FORSTER. Just a moment here, friend Dickens. We're going to tell a Christmas story?

DICKENS. We're going to perform a Christmas story, yes, John.

FORSTER. Are there ghosts and such things in this story?

DICKENS. Most assuredly. What's a Christmas story without them?

FORSTER. And we, respectable adults, are going to glide about, pretending to be these ghosts, which are strictly the products of over-fertile imaginations?

DICKENS. Yes, again, John. (*A pause.*)

FORSTER. Do I get to play 'em?

DICKENS. My entire plan rests on the very assumption that you'll play a number of ghosts.

FORSTER. Good. Otherwise, I'd not participate. But, as it stands—I'll do it. (*There's a boy in* FORSTER, *too.*) And I'll act the devil out of all of you!

DICKENS. Bravo! Now, the roles. (*As he makes the assignments,* DICKENS *gives each person a prop, or an article of clothing which they will use in some way in some point—or in various points—of the story. Tied to each*

item—all of which are on the coat rack except for the ring—is a scroll on which DICKENS *has written a brief description of each of the first characters they will play. To* CHARLEY, *a cap. To* HELEN, *a shawl. To* CATHERINE, *a bonnet, with a ragged grey wig attached. To* STANFIELD, *a quill pen. To* FREDERICK, *a top hat. To* MRS. STANFIELD, *a gold ring which he takes from his vest pocket. To* LEMON, *a welsh wig. To* FORSTER, *a large, distinctive handkerchief.*) To Charley, the very young gentlemen, beginning with a caroller. To Helen, the very young ladies, also beginning with a caroller. Now, you two pick a carol you both know—a good one, too. As for you, Stanny, to you fall the young, hardworking men—a role to which you're well accustomed, beginning with a clerk called Cratchit. Frederick, to you, a mixture of the dandies and the men who are determined to get ahead and accomplish great things in the world—a role to which you are thoroughly unaccustomed. Begin with a nephew named, of all names, Fred. For you, my dear Catherine, the matrons and the mothers—the latter position you fill so well, and are acquainted with through experience, though the former will demand imagination on your part. Your first assignment is a creature known as Mrs. Fezziwig. As for you, Mrs. Stanfield, all the young and available ladies; for Uncle Porpoise, those roles which are the most well-rounded; and for you, Forster, all that's left—including a ghost or two. Within these bounds, feel free to play whomever and whatever you like. I shan't be annoyed if you stretch or exchange assignments on occasion, so long as you act for the sake of the story.

(*During this speech, the following activities occur:* STANFIELD *removes his coat and hangs it on the coat rack, which is carried back up to the turret.* CATHERINE *and* MRS. STANFIELD *move the lecturn to the landing of the turret, and* FREDERICK *places a high stool behind it. An ink pot is taken from the trunk and is placed on*

the lecturn, along with some paper—or, the ink pot may already be fastened onto the lecturn. DICKENS *takes a few small money sacks and a large ledger from the trunk, and puts them on the desk. A quill, an ink-pot, and the candlestick are already there.*)

DICKENS. Make use of the items I've given you; carry them through the entire tale, giving a unity to our work. Use whatever you like in this room: use the costumes, use the furniture. Use each other. Confer, if you like. Bear in mind one thing only: Marley is dead. There is no doubt whatever about that. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful will come of the story we are about to create. Marley is dead as a doornail. Mind, I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a doornail. I might have been inclined to regard a coffin nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But, the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile, and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley is dead as a doornail. (*With* FORSTER's *aid, he moves the desk Down Center of the second level, and places one chair behind it, and one chair to its Left.*) Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners, for I don't know how many years. (*He and* FORSTER *shake hands.* FORSTER *then turns to exit through the door, Right.*) Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and his sole mourner. (FORSTER *pauses at the door.*) And even Scrooge was not so terribly cut up by the sad event. Being an excellent man of business, on the very day of the funeral, he solemnized the occasion with an undoubted bargain. Scrooge never painted out old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterward, above the warehouse door:

Scrooge and Marley. (FORSTER *exits.* DICKENS *puts on a coat, which has been hanging on the back of the desk chair, and turns down the gas lamp, darkening the room.*) Once upon a time—of all good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already; it had not been light all day. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole. (*He takes a small make-up box from a drawer. As speaks, he applies some paint to his face, a false nose, a grey wig, and a pair of wire-rimmed spectacles.*) Oh, but he was a tightfisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue, and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him. He iced his office in the dog days, and he didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

(*He is now* SCROOGE. *Everyone has left the stage but* SCROOGE *and* BOB CRATCHIT, *who is busily writing at his desk on the turret, and trying not to notice the cold. A pause.* FREDERICK, *as nephew* FRED, *bursts into the room, from Up Right.*)

FRED. (*Tossing a small gift—a candy cane, or a piece of fruit, perhaps—to* CRATCHIT.) A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE. (*Annoyed at the intrusion, he looks up for a moment, but not at* FRED. *Then, back to work.*) Bah. Humbug.

FRED. Christmas a humbug, uncle? You don't mean that, I'm sure.

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

FRED. Come then, what right have you to be dismal? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE. What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money? A time for finding yourself a year older but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em presented dead against you. Bah. Humbug!

FRED. Don't be cross, uncle.

SCROOGE. What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! 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. (*Getting up from his desk with a few money bags and crossing to a small safe—a hinged floorboard.*) Nephew! 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. There are many things from which I have derived good by which I have not profited, I dare say—Christmas among them. It's the only time I know of when men and women open their shut-up hearts and think of less fortunate people as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures. 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 I say God bless it!

(*He puts a stick of wood on the fire.* CRATCHIT *bursts into applause at the end of the speech.*)

SCROOGE. (*Standing. To* CRATCHIT.) Let me hear another sound from you, and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. (*To* FRED.) 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 tomorrow

SCROOGE. (*Back at his desk.*) I'll dine with the devil first.

FRED. But why, uncle?

SCROOGE. Why did you get married?

FRED. Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE. (*As if that were the only thing in the world more ridiculous than "Merry Christmas."*) "Because I fell in love." Good afternoon. (*He turns back to his work.*)

FRED. You never came to see me before I married. 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 cannot 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 visit in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So, a merry Christmas, uncle! (*From his coat, he pulls a small wrapped package and sets it down on* SCROOGE's *desk. Then, he turns for the door.*)

SCROOGE. Good afternoon!

FRED. (*Turning back.*) And a Happy New Year! (*He exits.*)

SCROOGE. Good afternoon! (*Turning on* CRATCHIT.) And you're another fellow. My clerk, with fifteen shillings a

week, a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to bedlam.

(*A knock on the door, and two* PORTLY GENTLEMEN—*the* FIRST *is* LEMON *and the* SECOND *is* FORSTER—*enter.*)

FIRST PORTLY GENTLEMAN. Scrooge and Marley's, I believe? Have I the pleasure of addressing Mister Scrooge, or Mister Marley?

SCROOGE. Mister Marley has been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago this very night.

SECOND PORTLY GENTLEMAN. (*Handing* SCROOGE *their credentials.*) We have no doubt his liberality is well-represented by his surviving partner. (SCROOGE *examines the credentials and hands them back distastefully.*)

FIRST PORTLY GENTLEMAN. At this festive time of the year, Mister 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?

FIRST PORTLY GENTLEMAN. Plenty of prisons.

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

FIRST PORTLY GENTLEMAN. They are. I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE. (*Considering.*) 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.

SECOND PORTLY GENTLEMAN. Under the impression that they scarcely furnish cheer of mind or body, a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time because it is a time, of all others, when want is keenly felt, and

abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for? (*He opens a small notebook, prepared to record* SCROOGE's *donation.*)

SCROOGE. Nothing.

SECOND PORTLY 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 myself merry at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough, and those who are badly off must go there.

FIRST PORTLY 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—I don't know that.

FIRST PORTLY 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 interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly.

SECOND PORTLY GENTLEMAN. But, Mister Scrooge—

SCROOGE. (*Showing them to the door.*) Good afternoon.

SECOND PORTLY GENTLEMAN. I can only say, Mister Scrooge, that I hope you will consider the spirit of the day, and think again. Here is my card.

SCROOGE. (*Taking the card, and tearing it slowly.*) Bah. Humbug. (*The two* PORTLY GENTLEMEN *exit.* SCROOGE *feeds the torn card to the fire.* HELEN *and* CHARLEY *enter through the turret door as* CAROLLERS. *They pause, as* SCROOGE *stands at the fireplace, and begin to sing "The Christmas Child."* SCROOGE *turns, and grabs a poker. He walks quickly up the steps of the turret, and the* CHILDREN, *frightened, stop their singing.* CHARLEY *slowly takes off his cap, and holds it out.* SCROOGE *raises the poker over his head.*) Quiet! (*The* CHILDREN *scurry away.* SCROOGE

comes back down the steps.) Beggars. Pests. (*Off-stage, one of the actors rings a handbell. It is five o' clock.* SCROOGE *checks his watch, and* CRATCHIT *bolts from his desk. He snuffs his candle, and any that are nearby, and puts on a comforter which has been hanging on the coat rack. He approaches* SCROOGE, *who is likewise making ready to leave.*) You'll be wanting all day tomorrow, I suppose?

CRATCHIT. If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE. (*Taking some coins from a money bag, and paying him.*) It's not convenient, and it's not fair. If I was to stop your wages half-a-crown, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound. And yet, you don't think me ill-used when I pay a day's wages for no work.

CRATCHIT. It's only once a year, Mister Scrooge.

SCROOGE. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December. But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning.

CRATCHIT. Yes, sir. Thank you, Mister Scrooge. (*He moves to exit, then turns back.*) And a merry Christmas, Mister Scrooge. (*He exits.*)

SCROOGE. "A merry Christmas, Mister Scrooge." Bah. Humbug.

(*Making certain that no one sees, he carefully unwraps the package* FRED *left on his desk. He peeks inside, shuts it up quickly, and locks it in the safe. He stands, and narrates as* DICKENS. *By the time this speech is over, there are no lights on the stage.*)

DICKENS. Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and, having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's book, went home to bed. (*The lecturn is cleared from the turret.*) Now, it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on his door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact that Scrooge had seen

it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place; also that Scrooge had as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the City of London. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley since the last mention of his dead partner that afternoon. (*The last light is extinguished.* SCROOGE *moves Upstage Right toward the door, with a candle in his hand.*) And then, let any man explain, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, not a knocker, but— [SOUND EFFECT #1: The low howling of wind, until the candle goes out.]

(*He reverts to* SCROOGE. *A black figure*—FORSTER, *in the black cloak, hood resting on his shoulders—is standing at the door.* SCROOGE *lights the candle, and, as he lifts it, it illuminates* FORSTER'S *face. He has the large handkerchief wrapped around his chin, tied at the crown of his head.*)

SCROOGE. —Marley's face! (*He quickly backs away in shock; the candle goes out.* FORSTER *draws the hood over his face.* SCROOGE *relights the candle and holds it up, seeing nothing.*) Bah. (*He puts his key in the "door."* FORSTER *squeaks, like a large old door swinging open, then disappears behind the real door, slamming it shut.* [SOUND EFFECT #1A: a slamming door, with reverberation.] *A pause.* SCROOGE *relights the candle, and examines the inside of the door—half-expecting to be terrified by the sight of* MARLEY'S *pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there is nothing. He slides two bolts on the door shut.*) Humbug. (*He goes to the window seat, removes his coat, and takes from the storage unit a nightgown, a long cap with a tassle, and a shawl.* [SOUND EFFECT #2: Low sound of wind. It quickly fades.] SCROOGE *crosses to the fireplace.*) Humbug. (*He sits on a stool by the fire, and takes a pan of gruel and a spoon from near the fireplace and eats. Suddenly, the bells on the wall begin to clang;*

first softly, then louder, until they are jangling furiously. [SOUND EFFECT #3: the bells on the wall are joined by louder, deeper bells, also quite loudly. A loud gong is heard, and the sounds die as quickly as they began.]) Humbug! It's nothing! It's the wind! (*A pause.* SCROOGE *sits rigidly on his stool. Heavy steps are heard upon the stairs.* [SOUND EFFECT #4: chains are being dragged up the stairs.]) It's humbug still! I won't believe it! (*The upper right door swings open* [SOUND EFFECT #4a: A crash of thunder.], *and a bright, eerie light illuminates the doorway.* MARLEY'S GHOST—FORSTER, *in a ragged suit, wrapped in the chains from the horse collar—enters. As he does, the eerie light dies out, and a dim light comes up in the room.*) How now? What do you want with me?

MARLEY. Much.

SCROOGE. Who are you?

MARLEY. Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE. Who *were* you, then?

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

SCROOGE. Can you sit down?

MARLEY. I can.

SCROOGE. Do it, then.

MARLEY. (*Sits in a chair opposite* SCROOGE.) 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 cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are. Do you see this toothpick? (*Holding one up.*)

MARLEY. I do.

SCROOGE. You are not looking at it.

MARLEY. I see it, notwithstanding.

SCROOGE. 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! (MARLEY *raises a frightful cry—a loud, melancholy wail—which sends* SCROOGE *scurrying behind his stool at the fireplace.*) Mercy! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

MARLEY. Man of worldly mind! Do you believe in me, or not?

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

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

SCROOGE. You are wrapped in chains. 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. It is.

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 labored on it since. It is a ponderous chain!

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

MARLEY. I have none to give. A very little more is all that is permitted me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house. In life, my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole. Weary journies 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, on the wings of the wind. No rest, no peace, incessant torture of remorse. (*Again he sends up a wail, and rattles his chains.*)

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 were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop in the comprehensive ocean of my business!

SCROOGE. Don't be hard on me, Jacob!

MARLEY. My time is nearly gone. How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I am here tonight to warn you that you have yet a chance of escaping my fate. A chance of my procuring, Ebenezer.

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

MARLEY. You will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE. Is that the chance you mentioned, Jacob?

MARLEY. It is.

SCROOGE. I think I'd rather not.

MARLEY. Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. (*He crosses to the Downstage window.*) Look you, down upon the people of this planet, your fellow creatures crawling, senses shut, through life. Many of them are known to you. You see them on the streets, in the shops, on the Exchanges. They go about their business, seldom lifting their eyes to the crying children, to the inhuman misery that surrounds them. But what is this misery to what they will know when, gone from this life, they seek to interfere for good in human affairs, and discover that they have lost the power forever? Oh, captive bound and double-ironed, not to know that any human spirit, working kindly in its own sphere, will find its mortal life too short for its

usefulness to mankind! Not to know that no amount of eternal regret can make amends for a life's opportunities misused. Yet, such are these. (*To* SCROOGE.) Expect the first spirit tomorrow, when the bell tolls one.

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

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

(*He exits through the door, facing* SCROOGE. *Though he is out of sight, the tail of his chain is visible, and* SCROOGE *follows it, until it winds out of sight.* [SOUND EFFECT #5: THUNDER.] *As soon as the chain is gone, the door slams shut, and the bolts shoot across. A pause.* SCROOGE *tries the door. It is locked tight. The room is silent.*)

SCROOGE. Bah . . . (*He hasn't the heart to squeeze out a "humbug." He hurries to bed, hops in, and blows out the light. A peep.*) Humbug. (*A pause. Then, the hand-bell rings one.*) One! It was past two when I went to bed. An icicle must have gotten into the works! (*He lights a candle, sitting up in bed. Suddenly, we hear a strange tremulo on the violin, then a run up one string. The turret is lit, and there, violin and bow in hand, is* STANFIELD, *as the* GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST.) Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was fortold me?

CHRISTMAS PAST. (*Gentle, childlike, and somehow far away.*) I am.

SCROOGE. Who and what are you?

CHRISTMAS PAST. I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE. Long past?

CHRISTMAS PAST. No, your past.

SCROOGE. What business brings you?

CHRISTMAS PAST. Your welfare.

SCROOGE. I'm much obliged, but I can't help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would be more conducive to that end.

CHRISTMAS PAST. Your reclamation, then.

SCROOGE. Bah. What reclamation is there in the past. I don't want to see it.

CHRISTMAS PAST. Why not?

SCROOGE. Because it is unpleasant to me. No good can come of it.

CHRISTMAS PAST. Take heed! Remember what you have seen already! (*This has its effect on* SCROOGE.) Rise, and walk with me!

SCROOGE. (*Getting out of bed, and approaching the* GHOST.) I? But I am mortal, and likely to fall.

CHRISTMAS PAST. Bear but a touch of my hand, and you shall be upheld in more than this! (*He extends the end of his bow, which* SCROOGE *grabs onto, and whisks him up to the turret. With a wave of the bow.*) Is this place familiar to you?

(CHARLEY *enters as* YOUNG EBENEZER, *with a book in his hand. He takes the stool to the middle of the second level, and sits. He opens the book and reads.*)

SCROOGE. Good heavens! I was at school in this place! I was a boy here!

CHRISTMAS PAST. These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us. (CHARLEY *lifts his eyes from the book, and sighs.*) The school is not quite deserted. A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still. (YOUNG EBENEZER *begins to hum "The Christmas Child."*)

SCROOGE. (*Recognizing him, goes to him, and places a hand on his shoulder.*) Poor boy.

(HELEN *enters as* FAN, YOUNG EBENEZER'S *sister. She doesn't see* SCROOGE; *she runs to* YOUNG EBENEZER. *He is ecstatic to see her.*)

FAN. Ebenezer! Dear, dear brother! I have come to take you home!

SCROOGE. Fan!

YOUNG EBENEZER. Home, Fan?

FAN. Yes, home, for good and all. Father is so much kinder than he used to be. He spoke so gently to me one night that I wasn't afraid to ask him once more if you might come home. And he said yes, you should. He sent me in a coach to bring you.

YOUNG EBENEZER. This *is* a merry Christmas, Fan!

FAN. We're to be together all Christmas, and have the merriest time in the world. Let's get your trunk! (*They exit.*)

CHRISTMAS PAST. Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered.

SCROOGE. (*Looking after them.*) But she had a large heart.

CHRISTMAS PAST. So she had. She died a woman, and had, as I think, children.

SCROOGE. One child.

CHRISTMAS PAST. True. Your nephew.

SCROOGE. I wish . . .

CHRISTMAS PAST. What is the matter?

SCROOGE. Nothing, nothing. There were some children singing a Christmas carol at my door last night. I should like to have given them something, that's all. (*The lights go full.*)

CHRISTMAS PAST. Do you know this place?

SCROOGE. (*Something about this new place jogs his memory.*) Know it? I was apprenticed here!

(LEMON, *as* FEZZIWIG, *a warehouse owner to whom*

SCROOGE *was apprenticed long ago, bustles in, wearing the Welsh wig.*)

FEZZIWIG. Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!

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

(FREDERICK *enters as* YOUNG SCROOGE, *now about twenty-one, as cheerful as old* SCROOGE *is dour. With him is* FORSTER, *as* DICK WILKINS, *also an apprentice, and also about twenty-one.*)

FEZZIWIG. (*Moving a chair upstage.*) No more work tonight. Christmas Eve, Dick! Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the place cleared away before a man can say "Jack Robinson"!

(DICK *and* EBENEZER *set to work, clearing away tables and chairs. They clear away a space large enough to permit dancing, singing as they go.*)

SCROOGE. Dick Wilkins, to be sure! Bless me, yes. He was very much attached to me was Dick. Poor Dick. Dear, dear . . .

FEZZIWIG. Hilli-ho! Clear away, my lads, and let's have lot's of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrip, Ebenezer!

(*As they work, in comes* MRS. STANFIELD *as* BELLE, SCROOGE's *fiancée, and the* FEZZIWIGS' *daughter;* CATHERINE *as* MRS. FEZZIWIG; *and* HELEN *and* CHARLEY *as little* FEZZIWIGS. *The children should also have little Welsh wigs. More singing; punch is poured, and partaken of.*)

FEZZIWIG. (*Quieting the crowd.*) My dears, it's Christmas Eve. A toast to that glorious occasion! May tomorrow, and the whole of the new year find us merry, content, and

above all, filled with the happy good will of the season toward all our fellows!

EVERYONE. Bravo! To Christmas! (*Etc.*)

FEZZIWIG. And, in honor of the great day, I have engaged the services of the most renowned musician in the City of London. His nimble tricks over and amongst the strings of that most splendid of instruments are too well-known that I should relate them. You all know him; you're all no doubt acquainted with his miraculous capacity to raise the spirits of even the most mortuary of countenances. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the highly valued . . . (*With a flourish, he indicates* CHRISTMAS PAST, *who stands ready with violin and bow.*)

CHRISTMAS PAST. (*As the crowd applauds.*) My, my. Don't deserve it, really. Ladies and gents: "The Christmas Child."

(*He—or, magically, the violin alone—strikes up a reel, based on "The Christmas Child." The dancing begins.* SCROOGE *acts like a man possessed, laughing, dancing among the partners, jesting if someone misses a step, etc. The dancing ends amid loud applause for the fiddler, which* CHRISTMAS PAST *acknowledges with a deep bow.*)

CHRISTMAS PAST. (*As the guests gather around the trunk, for the opening of some gifts for the children.*) A small matter, to make these silly folk so full of gratitude.

SCROOGE. Small?

CHRISTMAS PAST. Why, is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money—three or four, perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves praise?

SCROOGE. It isn't that at all, Spirit. He had the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome. The happiness he gave was quite as great as if it had cost a fortune . . . (*He is suddenly quiet.*)

CHRISTMAS PAST. What is the matter?

SCROOGE. Nothing particular.

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.

(*A cheer from the crowd, as a toy drum is unwrapped, and* CHARLEY *tries it out.*)

FEZZIWIG. My dears, the hour grows late. Before we depart, however, Mrs. Fezziwig and I have an announcement. An announcement of a most auspicious nature.

SCROOGE. Spirit, show me no more.

FEZZIWIG. As you know, Mrs. Fezziwig and I have labored these many years to rear a very particular child. The fruits of our labor, I am happy to say, are most satisfactory—more than satisfactory. They are summed up in one beautiful word—Belle. (*Applause.*) Now at the very dawn, the very ripeness of her youth and beauty, she has surrendered to the wiles of one of you in this very room. One to whom I've furnished shelter, food, and a warm bed.

DICK WILKINS. A sore back and aching eyes, too!

FEZZIWIG. Yes, I'll not deny he's the hardest-working apprentice ever to balance a book or close an account. Come Spring, our lovely Belle shall wed that most industrious of young men, Mister Ebenezer Scrooge! (*Applause.*)

DICK WILKINS. A dance! A dance from the couple!

(*The lights are dimmed, and* YOUNG SCROOGE *and* BELLE *embrace, and dance a slow waltz based on "The Christmas Child."*)

SCROOGE. (*Scarcely able to watch.*) Spirit, take me home.

(*As the short dance ends,* YOUNG SCROOGE *and* BELLE *drift apart,* YOUNG SCROOGE *to the desk, which was moved Downstage. He sits, and becomes absorbed in*

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