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SF PERUSALS

The Christmas Carol

by Brian Way

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THE CHRISTMAS CAROL
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THE CHRISTMAS CAROL

In the Distance a Church Bell chimes the hour, others join in, many others, growing nearer and nearer to us, until all are dominated by one bell which is quite close.

With the bells, light slowly fades to the sombre gloom of a smoky and foggy London Street ....but the gloom is in sharp contrast to the hearts of people. We hear laughter, we hear a voice call "A Merry Christmas" and others answer, and there is more laughter. And we hear carol-singers approaching nearer, nearer, nearer, until they are actually with us, standing under their lanterns, solemnly and yet lustily singing out their hearts.

Other people pass them in the street, some hurrying with holly and Mistletoe and Christmas trees, others, laden with baskets of good christmas food or gift-parcels, are glad to linger and rest their burdens for a moment, and there is a crippled beggerman, who simply enjoys the gaiety and the company. These are people coming and going on their way home. It is cold - and all these people are cold on their extremeties: cold on their noses and the tips of their fingers: and their feet are cold. But they also feel the warmth and gaiety and hope of Christmas, and it is this feeling they share, each with another, even with complete strangers. And we hear the sound of coppers in the collecting tins of the carol singers - and the singing itself is freely punctuated with the simplest words: "Thank you, sir." "Merry Christmas to you." "And to you." And so on.

But now another man comes very forcibly to the carol-singers. He stands for a moment, too angry to speak, quite unnoticed by the singers, but avoided by one or two other passers-by. Even the cripple moves a little farther away - and suddenly SCROOGE gives vent to his anger.

SCROOGE Silence this wretched caterwauling.

But the singers sing.

SCROOGE Silence, I say.

And the singing dies away.

SCROOGE How can a man work against such noise?

There is silence now, and glances from one to another, and a smile, and a bold voice calls out "A merry Christmas, Mr Scrooge," and others add their greeting.

SCROOGE Humbug.

A youngeman in the group - Scrooge's nephew, FRED comes forward....

FRED — *(To his companions)* Let me speak to him. *(To SCROOGE)* A Merry Christmas, Uncle.

SCROOGE — Who calls me uncle?

FRED — Who else but your nephew?

He laughs disarmingly and others laugh with him, enjoying both the joke and the courage behind it.

SCROOGE — Huh! Fred! I might have known. Wasting your time, caterwauling with others as lazy as yourself.

FRED — Caterwauling, perhaps. But not wasting time.

A VOICE — Why not join us, Mr Scrooge?

ANOTHER — Yes, come and sing with us.

ANOTHER — We could do with a deep, deep bass.

And there is laughter again and preparations to start another carol. Through it another voice is loud and clear.

VOICE — And what about Bob Cratchit? He can sing with the best of us.

FRED — Good idea, I'll fetch him.

SCROOGE — No, sir, you shall not fetch him.

FRED — No, uncle? Then I'll call him. *(Calling - joined quickly by others.)* Bob. Bob Cratchit.

And there is more Gaiety and bustle and excitement as they call. And as Bob Cratchit comes out there are cheers and greetings and hasty explanations. And the joy is cut by Scrooge with a single word.

SCROOGE — Cratchit!

There is silence.

SCROOGE — Cratchit, return to your work.

CRATCHIT — But - but, sir.....

SCROOGE — Don't "But, sir," me, Cratchit. Return to your work. This instant.

FRED — Come, uncle, be kind....

SCROOGE — Kind, sir? I pay my clerk fifteen shillings a week. I doubt he's worth it, but I pay it. I pay it every week and I expect him to work every week.

FRED — But uncle, it's Christmas.

SCROOGE — Christmas. Humbug.

FRED — Christmas a humbug. Come, you don't mean that.

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

FRED — Then what right you you to be miserable? What reason to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE — Bah! Humbug!

He attempts to leave them, but FRED outs him off.

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!

And as he goes on he speaks not only to FRED but to others in the group - buttonholing them, penetrating the warmth of their goodwill with the frozeness of his own misery.

What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money? A time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer? A time for balancing your books and finding every item in 'em dead against you? If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "A 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!

And others join in with simple protests.

SCROOGE — 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 Oh, uncle, really. There are lots of things that I'm sure have done me - good, as you call it, without me making a penny from them, Christmas among the rest.

There is agreement with what he says, and other moments of agreement as he goes on.

But, surely, Christmas - well, Christmas is different.....

SCROOGE Different?

FRED Yes. I've always thought of Christmas as a good time.

SCROOGE A good time!

FRED Yes, a good time. Oh, I know what you're thinking - you're thinking I mean a - a lazy, good-for-nothing time. But I don't mean that. I mean a good time - a time when you, when you <u>feel</u> good, when you make an effort, a real effort, to be pleasant and kind - and forgiving - and charitable. No uncle, you listen to me. It's the one time in the year when you open up - open up your heart; and - and you notice other people; doesn't matter what they're like - you realise they're alive, they're flesh and blood, they love and hate, and sing and laugh, and cry and suffer - yes, uncle, suffer. Just on this one day a year - one day - that's all, just one day, we have a thought for them as well as ourselves. And that's what Christmas means to me, uncle - just that. It may never have put a penny in my pocket, but I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good - and I say God bless it.

There is a moment's silence - then BOB CRATCHIT, who has been listening in the background, comes forward a little clapping. SCROOGE turns to him.

SCROOGE Let me hear another sound out of you, and you'll keep Christmas by losing your job. *(To Fred.)* You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into parliament.

FRED Uncle, don't be angry. Come, dine with us tomorrow. Come and spend Christmas with me and my wife and ....

SCROOGE I'll see you in hell first.

FRED But why? Why?

SCROOGE Why did you get married?

FRED Why? Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE Because you fell in love. Good afternoon.

FRED Oh, come, uncle. You never came to see me before I got married, so why give it as a reason for not coming now.

SCROOGE *(Again trying to move away.)* Good afternoon.

FRED I want nothing from you. I ask nothing of you. Why can't we be friends?

SCROOGE Good afternoon.

FRED I'm sorry, uncle. Heaven knows I've tried. What else can I say? What else can I do?

SCROOGE You can move out of my way. And you can take your friends off somewhere where their singing won't disturb my work.

FRED Very well, uncle. But just let me remind you of this. We've never yet had a quarrel that's been my fault - and we never will. Certainly not on Christmas Eve. And if you change your mind - you'll still be welcome.

SCROOGE Good Afternoon.

FRED *(Laughing)* Not just good afternoon, uncle. But - A Merry Christmas.

SCROOGE Good Afternoon.

FRED And a Happy New Year.

SCROOGE Good afternoon.

But now all join Fred in calling "A Merry Christmas" and "A Happy New Year" - and then FRED starts them all on "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen, Let Nothing You Dismay" and as they sing they start to go.

SCROOGE returns to his office and to his books .... he is followed in my an anxious BOB CRATCHIT, who creeps to his own desk and lights a candle to work by ....

SCROOGE You're another of them. A clerk earning fifteen shillings a week.....thinking you have a right to a merry Christmas....I'll retire to Bedlem. Get on with your work.

BOB Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir.

SCROOGE at once starts adding up rows and columns of figures.....Cratchit too tries to work.....but he is too cold....he goes to the fire and pokes it about...but nearly puts it out and has to blow on the ashes to try to keep it alive...then he attempts to creep past SCROOGE to get some coal...

SCROOGE Cratchit! Coal is an expensive commodity. I work out to a penny exactly what we need and when we need it. Get on with your work.

BOB It seems to be particularly cold today, sir.

SCROOGE Then get on with your work. There's nothing like work for getting a man's mind off things like the weather.

BOB Just one shovel full, please, sir.

SCROOGE No, Cratchit. We have used all the coal we need for today. Don't let me have to tell you again - get on with your work.

BOB Yes, sir.

BOB sits down, frozen - and pathetically tries to warm himself over the light of the candle...and SCROOGE continues to add his figures...getting very worried.

SCROOGE Cratchit.

BOB Yes, sir.

SCROOGE Come here, Cratchit.

BOB Yes, sir.

SCROOGE Cratchit - three times I have checked the Petty Cash total for this week.

BOB Yes, sir, I left the details on your desk... it came to six shillings and eightpence, sir.

SCROOGE It comes to five shillings and eightpence, Cratchit. I tell you I have checked it three times.

BOB — Yes, sir, but the coal and the candles sir account for....

SCROOGE — There are no receipts for coal and candles, Cratchit. Furthermore, I did not authorise the expenditure of an additional shilling on coal and candles.

BOB — Well, there was none left, sir.

SCROOGE — Of course there was none left. You waste them.

BOB — Certainly there were no candles....

SCROOGE — I am not interested in your candles. Use daylight, Cratchit. You light the candles too soon. Daylight is cheaper. Do you understand.

BOB — Well, sir, I.....

SCROOGE — Do you understand?

BOB — Yes, sir. But....

SCROOGE — I am glad you understand, Cratchit. I shall deduct the shilling from your salary so that the accounts will in no way be inconvenienced. That will be all, Cratchit.

BOB — But, sir. please.

SCROOGE — That will be all, Cratchit. Fetch me the Book of Debtors.

BOB — Yes, sir.

BOB goes miserably for the book and Scrooge continues to add and check his columns of figures.

BOB returns with the book....

SCROOGE — *(Looking up a particular entry.)* Ah, yes, I thought as much. His debt should have been paid yesterday. Was it?

BOB — No sir.

SCROOGE — *(After a pause.)* Continue, Cratchit.

BOB — Well, sir the people came, but ...

SCROOGE — And when did they come?

BOB — When you were at the Exchange, sir.

SCROOGE — You asked them to wait.

BOB — They couldn't wait, sir.

SCROOGE — So why didn't you take their money and give them a receipt. I've told you often enough.

BOB — Well sir.....

SCROOGE — Why?

BOB — Sir - they hadn't got any money, so I couldn't take it.

He is unable to go on....

SCROOGE — Well? Well?

BOB — Well, sir, they said they would be able to pay next week and I said - well, I said that I was sure you would understand, sir.

SCROOGE — You said what? Well? *(BOB is too afraid to speak.)* I shall take out a summons at once, Cratchit. If people do not pay their debts then they must go to prison for it, and their goods must be confiscated...

BOB — Oh, they will pay, sir. I'm sure of that.

SCROOGE — You're sure of that! And do not interrupt me. Do you suppose I should be where I am now if I had the same attitude as yours, Cratchit?

BOB — They will pay, sir. They just need a little more time.

SCROOGE — And they shall get a little more time, Cratchit. In the debtors prison.

BOB — But, sir, it's Christmas.

SCROOGE — Christmas - humbug! What has Christmas to do with it? Get back to your work Cratchit before you ruin me.

BOB — Yes, sir.

And CRATCHIT goes back to his work..

Two portly gentlemen arrive, very business-like, fussing with papers. They see BOB CRATCHIT first.

1st GENT — Is this - is this Scrooge and Morleys? *(CRATCHIT indicates SCROOGE.)* Ah, thank you, yes. Yes. *(They move to SCROOGE.)*

1st GENT — Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge or Mr Morley?

SCROOGE — Mr Morley has been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago this very night.

1st GENT — Well - we have no doubt his generosity is - is, er - continued by yourself, sir.

He hands SCROOGE his credentials. SCROOGE looks at them briefly and hands them back.

SCROOGE — Good afternoon.

2nd GENT — Mr Scrooge. At this festive time of the year, Mr Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute; as you no doubt realise, they suffer greatly at the present time, Mr Scrooge.

1st GENT — Indeed, indeed. Thousands of people lack even the ordinary necessities of life, let alone the simplest of comforts. We therefore feel that...

SCROOGE — Are there no prisons?

1ST GENT — Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE — And the Union Workhouses? Are they still in operation?

1st GENT — They are, sir. I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE — The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour then?

1st GENT — Both very busy, sir.

SCROOGE — Oh! I was afraid that from what you first said that something had occured to stop their useful work. I am very glad to hear it.

2nd GENT — But Mr Scrooge, neither the prisons nor the workhouses provide exactly what you or I - or for that matter any other human being - would call Christmas Cheer.

1st GENT — Precisely. So, Mr Scrooge, a few of us are raising a fund to provide the poor with meat and drink and means of warmth. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE — Nothing.

1st GENT — Er - you mean you wish us to withhold your name?

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 other people merry - particularly idle people. I help to support both the prisons and the workhouses - and they cost quite enough. Idle people who are badly off must go to them.

2nd GENT — Many can't go to them.

1st GENT — And many would rather die.

SCROOGE — Then let them die - and decrease the surplus population. It is none of my business.

2nd GENT — Sir - it is the business of all of us.

SCROOGE — No, sir, not all. If you consider it your business, then you had better attend to it, and allow me to attend to mine. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

For a moment the SECOND GENTLEMAN, though non-plussed, seems to want to continue: but the FIRST GENTLEMAN pulls him away. CRATCHIT would like to run forward, to give them something, but under the eye of SCROOGE he dare not do so. And as the TWO MEN leave, the clocks strike the half-hour, and CRATCHIT is at once alert.

SCROOGE — Time to go home, I suppose.

CRATCHIT — Well - er - yes, sir.

SCROOGE — Yes, sir! And you consider you've done an afternoon's work?

CRATCHIT — Well, there has been rather a lot of excitement, sir. But - then, we expect it at Christmas, don't we, sir?

SCROOGE — You expect it, Cratchit. I - ignore it. At least I do my honest best not to let it interfere with my work.

CRATCHIT — Yes, sir.

SCROOGE — And I suppose you'll want the whole day off for Christmas tomorrow.

CRATCHIT — Well, if its quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE — It's not convenient - and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown from your wages for it, you'd

think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound! Yet you don't think me ill-used for paying a day's wages for no work.

CRATCHIT It is only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE Only once a year. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December. However - I suppose you must have it.

CRATCHIT Thank you, sir.

SCROOGE Be here all the earlier next morning.

CRATCHIT Yes sir. Thank you sir. Merry Christmas, sir.

SCROOGE Out upon a merry Christmas. Humbug, I say. Humbug.

And so violent is he with these words that CRATCHIT is glad to be off home as fast as possible. SCROOGE starts on his journey home. A longish journey during which he talks a great deal to himself...

SCROOGE Curse the fog. And curse the stupity of the whole world. Christmas! Humbug! It's nothing but stealing. Calling it charity doesn't change it from what it is. Stealing. And listen to them... the bells, the singing, the laughter...pretence. That's what it is. Nothing but pretence, *(The lone voice of a small BOY is heard singing a carol. SCROOGE angrily shouts him away. The BOY laughs and runs.)* Instead of getting down to work and solving their problems through honest labour they pretend all is well and hide behind the laughter and the singing... and they expect everybody else to do the same. Well, at least old Jacob Marley and I avoided any such nonsense. We lived frugally, we worked hard. No man owed us anything and we owed nothing ourselves. *(He stops for a moment thinking of JACOB.)* Poor Jacob. Seven years ago this very night. You were a good man of business Jacob. Ah, but the business hasn't suffered by your going... *(He stumbles..)* Curse the fog and the darkness. Never mind. A house stuck away in the darkest alley is a good investment...the rooms are good to let for business and there's still enough space for living..Ah, where is that door? I can feel it with the knocker...

He stares at the knocker.

What's this? What's this? What am I seeing? *(He is staring at the knocker.)* No, Jacob. No. Whatever else it could do your face could never serve as a

knocker on a door. Jacob, don't haunt me like this..... I won't believe it. I won't. I won't.

And in his terror he crashes the knocker and the vision goes. There are hideous echoes throughout the house of the door noise.

There. There. Just a moment of fancy. It means nothing, nothing at all....

And yet as he goes through the door he instinctively looks back to see if there is anything behind the door...

Nothing - at all. What did I expect? To see his pigtail hanging on the other side. Humbug. It's all humbug!

He fastens the door...and goes on up the stairs towards his room...

Jacob you chose well when you chose a staircase as wide as this. You could drive a coach and four up it in comfort....aaahhh...

For a moment he is again frightened by some sound or imaginary sight.

Humbug! There's nothing to be afraid of. The offices are empty...the wine cellar below is empty... and there's enough light through the window from the street lamps to save having any other light...

He arrives at the top and goes to his own room...But the sights and sounds have unnerved him a bit, and he readily checks that there is nothing concealed anywhere.

Nobody under the table. Nobody under the sofa. Nobody under the bed. Nobody in the cupboards or the closet.. nobody inside MY dressing gown. Humbug.. of course there's nobody. What on earth have I to fear? It's all fancy. Nothing but fancy. I'll just take a good pot of gruel this one...lasted all the week.

He puts the gruel on to the embers of the fire and starts to undress...

Too cold to undress fully on a night like this. And no need anyway with a good thick dressing gown...a dressing gown to last for years. Has lasted for years, and'll see my life out yet. What? What?

And again he hears some sound and crosses to his door and looks, quite motionless to check that there is nothing there...

Humbug....nothing but humbug....

And he goes to eat his gruel...All the time he is eating there are some signs and portents of all not being well. He hears faint footsteps in the distance...He hears a coach drive up and stop outside and waits fearfully...doors creek and slam..but still nothing particular happens in his own room...

Then a single door bell rings..his own..and then other bells in the house, picking up a great and terrifying cacophony of sounds..which suddenly cut out...and there is the single sound of the approach of the GHOST OF JACOB MARLEY. (Author's note: this sound, in Dicken's terms, is made by a long chain of keys and cash boxes and other symbols of the avariciousness of the two men; in production, such a chain can lead to laughter and might be more atmospherically replaced with a single chain and the dragging of feet.)

THE GHOST which in one sense fills SCROOGE with terror, and in another does no more than challenge his disbelief, slowly approaches - and then stops a little way from SCROOGE....

SCROOGE — What do you want with me?

MARLEY — Much.

SCROOGE — Who are you?

MARLEY — Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE — You're mighty particular for a ghost. Who were you then?

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

SCROOGE — Yes. Yes, so you seem. Can you sit down?

MARLEY — I can.

SCROOGE — Do it then. You look more exhausted than you did seven years ago.

MARLEY — *(Sitting, after a moment.)* You don't believe in me?

SCROOGE — No, I don't.

MARLEY — What proof can I offer you, beyond that of your own senses?

SCROOGE — I - I don't know.

MARLEY — Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE Because - well, because a little thing can affect them, a slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be a bit of undigested beef - or a blot of mustard - or a crumb of cheese - or even a bit of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are. You see this toothpick?

MARLEY I do.

SCROOGE You're not looking at it.

MARLEY But I see it, all the same.

SCROOGE Well, I have but to swallow this to be tormented for the rest of my days by a whole legion of ghosts. Humbug, I tell you. Humbug.

At this, MARLEY sets up a terrible cry, which frightens SCROOGE so much that he falls on his knees....

SCROOGE Mercy. Mercy. Why do you trouble me?

MARLEY Do you believe in me or not?

SCROOGE I do. I must. But tell me, Jacob - why do you walk the earth? And why do you trouble me?

MARLEY Listen, and I will tell you.

SCROOGE Yes, yes, tell me, Jacob, tell me. Tell me.

MARLEY Listen! Be still - and listen.

SCROOGE'S cringing and whining subsides.

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 any spirit that does not do so during life is condemned to do so after death - is condemned to wander through the world, as I am now, Ebenezer Scrooge; as I have been these seven years. As you have said, I am exhausted with restless wandering over seven whole years.

SCROOGE But the chains, Jacob? The chains. Why.....

MARLEY I forged them myself.

SCROOGE You?

MARLEY They are a heavy and a painful burden - and yet I made them myself during my own wretched life. The

chains you are forging, Ebenezer, will be no less heavy You are forging them yourself, link by link.

SCROOGE No, Jacob. No. Speak comfort to me, Jacob.

MARLEY I have none to give. Comfort comes from other Spirits, Ebenezer - and is given to other kinds of men. My spirit never moved beyond our counting house - and weary journies lie before me...

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, kindness were all my business. Making money was only a drop in the great ocean of my business. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed star which led the wise men to the poorest stable? Why? Why?

And as if in answer to his question the church clocks peel again.

MARLEY Hear me. My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE I will, I will. But don't be hard upon me; don't be flowery, Jacob, please.

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

SCROOGE No, Jacob, no.

MARLEY Tonight I am here to warn you - to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate; a chance and hope of my making, Ebenezer.

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

MARLEY You will be haunted by three spirits.

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

MARLEY It is.

SCROOGE I - I think I'd rather not.

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

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

MARLEY **Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to sound. Do not expect to see me again. But - for your own sake - remember what has passed between us. Remember. Remember.**

And as he speaks, the GHOST OF JACOB MARLEY slowly backsaway from SCROOGE, and then disappears altogether.

For a moment SCROOGE seeks after him. He manages to get out the word "Humbug" but without conviction. Then, tired and troubled, he goes to bed, clothed as he is...and sleeps.

There is silence and stillness..silence and stillness.. and and awesome feeling of expectancy..SCROOGE sleeps. (Note: If it is intended to use anything in the way of a real bed, it is to the point that Scrooge slept in a four-poster, with the four curtains fully drawn.)

During his sleep he is restless with a terrible nightmare. Suddenly the clock strikes the quarter.. and at once SCROOGE is awake..

SCROOGE A quarter past!

Again the clock strikes.

SCROOGE Half past!

Again the clock strikes.

SCROOGE A quarter to it!

And again the clock strikes.

SCROOGE The hour itself! And nothing else!

But before his relief can take root, the clock strikes one. Immediately there is more light..and the light is moving towards SCROOGE, revealing to him the SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PAST.

(Note: Dickens' own description of this ghost is well worth studying, but possibly very difficult to carry out in some respects, particularly that of "from the crown of its head there sprang a bright clear jet of light..with a great extinguisher for a cap, which is not held under its arm.." The author would suggest that simplicity be the absolute key-note of this ghost, with fully considered contrast with the others. The final ghost, the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME, needs to be in a dark cowled, full-length robe, for the face is never visible; the second, the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT, needs to be bright and gay...it is therefore

suggested that this first apparition be in a full white tunic, of a simple nature, without any attempt to do "the bright clear jet of light from the head"..and yet, at the same time, to follow Dicken's thoughts of "Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white, as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin..it wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful." Possibly also - "It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers.")

THE SPIRIT stops, quite close to SCROOGE.

SCROOGE Are - are you the spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold me?

C. PAST I am.

SCROOGE Who and what are you?

C. PAST I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE Long past?

C. PAST No. Your past.

SCROOGE Well - what business brings you here?

C. PAST Your welfare.

SCROOGE Very nice of you, I'm sure. But don't you think an uninterrupted night's sleep might do me even more good?

C. PAST Come! Rise - and walk with me. Come!

SCROOGE shrinks from this idea.

SCROOGE But where will you take me?

C. PAST To see mysteries you've forgotten.

SCROOGE Mysteries!

C. PAST Moments from your past - your own past.

SCROOGE I - I - er -

C. PAST Are you afraid?

SCROOGE No, but I - I -

C. PAST Let me touch you but once, and you will find there is nothing to fear.

THE SPIRIT moves towards him, its hand outstretched.

SCROOGE Keep away from me. No, no. Keep away. Don't touch me. Don't...

C. PAST But once...

SCROOGE is too afraid to move. THE SPIRIT reaches out and touches him over the heart...

C. PAST There! Now you will find there is nothing to fear.

SCROOGE *(Discovering just that, despite himself)* - No. No.

C. PAST Follow me.

Sounds come...and SCROOGE follows THE SPIRIT. And as they journey the light and the air change...and time too. After a while, SCROOGE stretches out his hand and touches THE SPIRIT...

SCROOGE Spirit, wait! Wait! *(THE SPIRIT stops; but does not speak.)* I - I know this place.

C. PAST You remember?

SCROOGE I lived here as a boy. I could walk it blind fold.

C. PAST Strange to have forgotten it for so many years. Look. Look.

And as SCROOGE looks he sees a strange kaleidoscope of shadowy forms moving in front of him. And there are voices on the air, calling Christmas and New Year wishes to each other.

SCROOGE I know them. I remember each and every face. I remember them from all those years ago..no..don't go. Stay...stay with me...

But the shadows fade, and SCROOGE is again alone with THE SPIRIT.

C. PAST Your lip is trembling. And what is that on your cheek?

SCROOGE *(Wiping away the tear.)* It's, it's a pimple.

C. PAST You remember - and I think you understand - you feel the past.

SCROOGE — Quickly, spirity - take me where you will. I'll follow.

C. PAST — Come.

Again they journey...and again the light and the air change .. And the SPIRIT suddenly stops.

C. PAST — Look.

SCROOGE looks and sees the shadow of a child sitting alone.

SCROOGE — It's a child.

C. PAST — What child?

SCROOGE — It's me, Spirit - alone, at school - waiting. Waiting.

C. PAST — Were you often alone?

SCROOGE — Nearly always, Spirit, I had no friends at school. My father hated me so I was seldom at home. I tried at school - I think I tried. But I had no friends to speak of. *(A TEACHER enters to THE BOY - looks at him, hands him a book.)* My real friends - my only friends - were those in books, Ali Baba - Robinson Crusoe - Robin Hood - They were my friends.

C. PAST — Look! *(A fantasy sequence bringing these to life for the lonely boy.)*

Again for a moment there is the shadow but this time THE SHADOW soon becomes substance.

C. PAST — Remember?

SCROOGE — I - I think I remember.

C. PAST — You last day at school. Look - your sister Fan.

And as SCROOGE looks, he sees himself on the day of leaving school, pacing about the room, again waiting..and very soon FAN comes to him.

FAN — I have come to bring you home.

SCROOGE — Home?

FAN — Yes, home home - for ever and ever.

SCROOGE — But - father?

FAN — Father's agreed. Oh, you won't even know father; he's so changed, so kind. So -

SCROOGE — But why? - what's happened?

FAN — Who knows what's happened. Just suddenly - one night - he spoke so gently to me when I was going to bed that I thought I'll ask him now - just this once more - whether you could come home! And he said "Yes; yes, you should come home. And he's arranged the coach for me to fetch you. And he's arranged that you don't have to come back here any more. And he's arranged that we shall all be together for Christmas - and that we shall have the merriest time in all the world.

SCROOGE — Oh, Fan, how wonderful. How wonderful.

FAN — Quickly, now. The coach is waiting.

SCROOGE — Not so fast, little Fan, not so fast.

FAN — But we mustn't waste a minute.

SCROOGE — I must fetch my books and - and -

FAN — Quickly then, fetch it. Fetch it.

SCROOGE — Now wait. I must stop being so excited. I can't even think properly. *(Very still for a moment.)* Fan, it's too wonderful. Say it again: I'm going home - and I don't have to come back here ever again. You did say that, didn't you? I didn't dream it.

Before FAN can answer a loud voice calls from off:

SCHOOLMASTER — Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there - and see it loaded on to the coach.

And the SCHOOLMASTER comes to FAN and SCROOGE THE YOUNGER. He is carrying a decanter of wine and three glasses on a tray. SCROOGE is both fearful and embarrassed by the loudness and the condescension of this SCHOOLMASTER, who stops suddenly.

SCHOOLMASTER — Master Scrooge! I suppose we'll have to get used to Mister Scrooge from now on, eh? We're a man, now, aren't we, boy?

SCROOGE — Well, yes, sir, I - I.

SCHOOLMASTER — I've seen many change from Master to Mister in my time.

Not an easy change to make, boy. It's a new life; new responsibilities; new endeavours, and this young lady, I take it, is your sister.

SCROOGE — Yes, sir, my sister, Fan.

SCHOOLMASTER — *(Pouring wine for the three and passing the glasses.)* I don't approve of young people drinking in the normal way - as you, boy, might well remember. However, this is a special occasion. I give you a toast - to Christmas, and to - Mister Scrooge! May you treat the world as it's treated you here.

They drink. Then FAN moves quickly to SCROOGE, her excitement in no way quelled by the SCHOOLMASTER. She raises her glass to him.

FAN — To Mister Scrooge.

And light fades from them and back to the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST and SCROOGE THE ELDER.

C. PAST — Your sister was always frail. But she had a great heart.

SCROOGE — Yes, she had. You're right, spirit, she had.

C. PAST — She died when still a very young woman; a married woman, with children.

SCROOGE — One child. Only one.

C. PAST — True. Your nephew.

SCROOGE — Yes. My nephew - Fred.

Pause.

C. PAST — Come - let us see another Christmas.

And again there is a change of light as they journey a little way. And again THE GHOST stops.

C. PAST — Look. Do you remember this place?

SCROOGE — Remember it? Why - I was apprenticed here. Dick and I.

D. PAST — You remember Dick?

SCROOGE — Dick was my greatest friend. We did everything together. And we were apprenticed to dear old Fezziwig, bless him.

C. PAST **Dear Fezziwig. Look.**

And OLD FEZZIWIG comes in "laughing all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence."

FEZZIWIG **Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!**

SCROOGE, now a young apprentice, and DICK WILKINS run in.

FEZZIWIG **Yo ho, my boys. No more work tonight. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer. We've got one minute, my boys, to make the place fit for a party; one minute before the guests arrive!**

DICK & SCROOGE **Yes, Mr Fezziwig.**

The preparations are fast and furiously gay. A table is brought in and gayly decorated with food and drink and candles. A tree, perhaps, and other forms of decoration. The Fezziwig ball is a matter of production and improvisation. The preparation merges into the festivities themselves. People arrive quickly on top of each other.

FIRST - The Fiddler, who tunes up his instrument like "fifty stomach-aches."
THEN - Mrs Fezziwig and
- One of her simpering daughters,
- One of the daughter's eager pursuers, who for most of the party rivals the attentions of Dick Wilkins.
THEN - Belle, to whom Ebenezer is at once devoted.

(Author's note: this completes the whole cast for the party as it is essential that Scrooge the elder and the Ghost of Christmas Past watch the proceedings.)

MR FEZZIWIG is a constant bustle of jovial hospitality, making sure that all have something to eat and drink from the moment they arrive. The scene includes -

1) The above arrival, greeting, eating and drinking;

2) A short, fast dance involving everybody;

3) A game of blind man's buff, in which Ebenezer is the one blind-folded. He catches Belle, and his prize, to everyone's delight - is a kiss - sweeping us into

4) Another gay dance, but there are moments of greater individuality in these:

- Ebenezer and Belle, then
- Mr and Mrs Fezziwig, then
- The Fezziwig girl, turn and turn about with Dick and his rival,
Then for a moment again
- Ebenezer and Belle.
- And then everybody at their wildest delight again.

(Author's note: There is no suggestion in Dickens that Belle was at this dance; however, by bringing her in at this stage, and focussing some definite moments on her growing relationship with Ebenezer, will undoubtedly help the next scene and add an essence of continuity that is rather essential at this stage.)

Throughout the whole scene, SCROOGE THE ELDER is elated almost to the point of being pulled into the scene himself; and as this dance ends, light begins to fade from the scene with everyone wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a great many "thank-you's" to MR FEZZIWIG for having such a wonderful party. SCROOGE and BELLE predominate in these thanks. And as the scene fades altogether, we concentrate again on SCROOGE and THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST: SCROOGE, momentarily is still filled with glee.

SCROOGE Dear old Fezziwig. Dear old Fezziwig....

And as the last light of the scene fades, and OLD FEZZIWIG's laugh fades, SCROOGE becomes aware of the GHOST, and subsides.

C. PAST A small matter - to make these silly folk so happy and so full of thanks.

SCROOGE Small!

C. PAST Is it not? He spent but a few pounds - three or four at the most. Is that so much to deserve such praise?

SCROOGE *(Still with some of the excitement he has just experienced.)* It isn't that, Spirit, it isn't that. He had the power to make us happy or unhappy.

C. PAST Us? Who do you mean?

SCROOGE All of us. But mainly Dick and I; we worked for him, we were his apprentices. He had the power to make our work light or heavy, a pleasure or a dreadful burden; and he used that power. He used that power; he used it in hundreds of little ways - in the way he spoke to us, or looked at us or asked us to do things. That's the kind of happiness he gave to us - and you can't buy that, even with a fortune. You - you can't....

Suddenly he realises THE GHOST is staring at him and he stops.

C. PAST What is the matter?

SCROOGE Nothing in particular.

C. PAST Something, I think.

SCROOGE No, nothing. I just wish, at this moment, I could say a word or two to my clerk, Bob Cratchit. That's all.

THE GHOST watches him for a moment, then breaks the mood.

C. PAST My time grows short. Quickly. Let us see another Christmas.

Again light changes as they journey a little way. The light reveals to us SCROOGE, still young, but slightly older than in the last scene. He is fully mature. The gaiety of the Fezziwig evening has left him, in its place is a driving, self-centred, eager ambition. And we see him now, with books, checking details, adding figures, excited and gripped by a world of business and commerce.

(This factor is of tremendous importance as quite clearly Scrooge, deep within himself, could have been quite different from the way he turned out; but the great determination to "better himself" and to "safeguard the future" became an obsession, until all the normal and everyday delights and struggles of living were superseded by a singular determination to make money. As Belle puts it; "The Golden Idol supersedes all;" in more modern terms, Aspiration is superseded by Ambition.)

SCROOGE No, no, Spirit, don't show me this. Spare me this.

C. PAST You remember the place?

SCROOGE I remember.

C. PAST You remember the occasion?

SCROOGE How could I ever forget? It was a moment concerning a particular opportunity.

C. PAST Two particular opportunities. This moment might be called the cross-roads in your life. You had to choose.

SCROOGE I chose as best I could. I thought I was doing the right thing. My whole future depended on it.

C. PAST Your whole future. What of others? What of their future?

SCROOGE Their future was their own affair. It was nothing to do with me.

C. PAST Look again - and see.

SCROOGE — No, spirit, no.

C. PAST — Look, I say.

And SCROOGE looks, and sees other people come to his former self: Belle, with whom he danced and to whom he is now engaged; Dick, his fellow apprentice and friend; Dick's Girl.

DICK — Come on, old man. If we don't go now we shall miss all the daylight. My feet are just tingling with the thought of a skate.

SCROOGE looks up for a moment, but is deeply involved in figures and continues to check them.

DICK — *(With a mixture of mock and genuine impatience.)* Ebenezer!

THE GIRL — Oh, he's all wrapped up in another of his silly old books. Come on, Ebenezer.

DICK — We'll soon move that. Come, Ebenezer, the books'll keep till tomorrow. For today - it's skating and then supper. *(Playfully snatching the books away.)* Let's put the books to bed, shall we?

SCROOGE — Dick, don't do that.

DICK — But the books are fed up with work. And it's Christmas.

SCROOGE — Give them back....

DICK — Tomorrow morning.

SCROOGE — I said "Give them back".

DICK — Oooooh, hoity-toity, and at Christmas too.

SCROOGE — Give - them - back! Dick!

DICK — *(To his GIRL.)* Here, catch.

SCROOGE — *(Laughing at DICK.)* Will you give that back to me at once, please.

DICK — *(Throwing the book to his GIRL.)* When you're a good boy and promise to forget all about them till tomorrow.

SCROOGE — Dick, will you stop fooling about and give me that book.

DICK *(Just as SCROOGE lunges at his GIRL.)* Look out.

The GIRL laughs as she throws the book back to DICK, and for a few seconds they go on teasing SCROOGE in this way, throwing the book backwards and forwards, taunting SCROOGE with a kind of pig-in-the-middle-game. And he gets more and more angry. And finally intercepts the book.

SCROOGE Now, leave it, will you.

DICK *(Going to him again.)* Aw, come, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE *(Really angry.)* I said leave it.

And there is dead silence and stillness for several seconds.

DICK Sorry. I didn't realise you were serious.

SCROOGE Well, I am.

DICK But we arranged this party months ago.

DICK's GIRL Months! We arranged it last Christmas.

SCROOGE All right, we arranged it a year ago. Things can change in a year. I'm sorry, but I can't come.

DICK *(Quite innocently incredulous.)* You what?

SCROOGE I said I can't come.

Now DICK and HIS GIRL are fully sensitive to the situation in terms of BELLE, who all this time has said nothing, but has just stared at SCROOGE. At first thinking he was part of the game that DICK was trying to play, and then gradually realising the fuller truth. Now... in the silence, in the awareness that DICK and HIS GIRL have played their full hand.. she speaks for the first time.

BELLE Happy Anniversary.

SCROOGE turns to her and looks at her, but cannot answer.

BELLE Happy Anniversary, my dear.

SCROOGE *(Still angry.)* Happy Anniversary! Don't try to get round me now with Happy Anniversary! There's always something! Anniversaries, birthdays, Christmas. Always something! It's nothing but Humbug. Humbug, humbug, humbug.....

DICK — All right, then it's humbug, whatever that may mean. But just get one thing straight, Ebenezer - I'm through after this. Do you understand. I've tried and I've tried and I've tried - God alone knows how I've tried - well I'm not trying any more. It's up to you now. Understand?

SCROOGE — Please yourself.

DICK — I said d'you understand.

SCROOGE — Oh, do as you like, only leave me alone.

DICK — *(Controlling himself for a long pause.)* All right. I will leave you alone. *(To his GIRL.)* Come on.

As they reach the door, he turns to BELLE.

Belle?

BELLE — I'll come in a moment.

DICK — We'll wait for you. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry, Belle.

He waits only long enough for BELLE to smile her reassurance and then goes, followed by HIS GIRL. There is silence between SCROOGE and BELLE. BELLE breaks it.

BELLE — Ebenezer, dear...don't you think...don't you feel that....that...

SCROOGE — That he's right? Is that what you're going to say? That Dick's right? *(BELLE tries to interrupt but SCROOGE takes no notice.)* If you think he's right Belle, then you must do what you think's best. I won't interfere. Only don't expect me to give up everything I've worked for just for the sake of some damn-fool skating party that you know as well as I do will be as boring as the last one, and doesn't do anything for any of us.

BELLE — I wasn't going to say that.

SCROOGE — If that's the kind of life you want then you're welcome to it, only you'd better find someone else to give it to you, 'cos I wont.

BELLE — You don't really care about us at all, do you?

SCROOGE — Oh, don't be petty?

BELLE You don't, do you? Oh, you did once, I know. Four years ago when we became engaged, but its gradually dwindled away until now it hardly exists at all.

SCROOGE For heavens sake Belle, don't start all that...

BELLE The only thing you really care about now is money. Money, money, money.

SCROOGE Business is a man's life. There's no place for women.

BELLE Exactly, and there's no place for women in such a life. Very well, Ebenezer. You have your world of business and I hope you enjoy it. And I hope your money will bring you all the comfort you need right through your old age.

SCROOGE Can't you begin to understand that...

BELLE Yes, I understand completely. I understand that I'm in your way and that the only thing that will ever matter to you is making money. Well, there - take it. I'll never stand in the way of your ambition.

And she throws her ring - the engagement ring he gave her - on the ground and leaves him. He looks at it. Turns it over with his foot, then moves angrily away from it.

SCROOGE Humbug. Parties and Christmas and the whole wretched lot of it. Nothing but humbug.

And as the YOUNG SCROOGE goes on muttering humbug, light fades from the scene and back to the SPIRIT and SCROOGE.

SPIRIT That was the turning point, wasn't it? Nothing but humbug.

SCROOGE Please, Spirit, take me away from here.

SPIRIT No. You shall see again each Christmas that followed. The whole miserable growth of that terrible world of humbug.

And there follows a fast-moving almost nightmare sequence of Christmas upon Christmas of the world of SCROOGE and business. The world in which everything that was not strictly business was nothing but humbug.

The sequence is fast moving. With many people coming and going. All in a rather brittle and stylised manner. A real nightmare.

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