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A CHRISTMAS CAROL

A One-Act Dramatisation

By Constance Cox

From the story by Charles Dickens

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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CHARACTERS

SCROOGE	MR. FEZZIWIG
BOB CRATCHIT	MRS. FEZZIWIG
SCROOGE'S NIECE	MRS. CRATCHIT
1st LADY	MARTHA CRATCHIT
2nd LADY	TOM CRATCHIT
MARLEY'S GHOST	PAWNBROKER
THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS	LAUNDRESS
YOUNG SCROOGE	CHARWOMAN
FANNY	Guests at Fezziwig's party

Winner of the Myra Stewart Cup for the Best Costume Play presented in the 1967 Drama Festival of the Sussex Federation of Townswomens' Guilds.

The scene throughout is Scrooge's office on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Period 1840.

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The scene is SCROOGE'S office. Late afternoon - winter.

Light is fading in the office which is shabbily and sparsely furnished with only the barest of necessities. SCROOGE'S desk is angled at R. of the stage, and CRATCHIT'S is similarly placed at L. opposite to his employer's. On each desk there is a lighted candle, an inkstand, and pens, various documents and ledgers. Against the centre of the back wall is a cupboard with shelves above it on which are law books, files, an odd deed box, and more papers. On either side of this cupboard are two wooden chairs. A large hat-stand is U.R. and on it hang the hats and coats of the two occupants of the office. A fire burns down in the footlights C. with fender and fire-irons, and in front of the fire is placed a stool. Chairs for SCROOGE and CRATCHIT are behind their desks.

As the curtain rises SCROOGE and BOB CRATCHIT are seated at their desks. SCROOGE is writing in a ledger. BOB is surreptitiously warming his hands at his candle. Outside the sound of voices can be heard singing "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen". BOB smiles in appreciation, rises and moves to cupboard C, where he opens a law book, checks a reference, and returns to his desk to stand at top corner. SCROOGE looks up.

SCROOGE What's that?

BOB What's what, sir? (Making an entry in ledger.)

SCROOGE That screeching - that caterwauling going on outside.

BOB It's the waits, sir. (Moves and sits at his desk.)

SCROOGE Waits? What are the waits doing in this corner of London?

- BOB (smiling nervously) It's the custom, sir, at Christmas, to visit even the business quarters.
- SCROOGE Custom? What have we to do with custom, except the kind that brings in money! Tell 'em to move on, Cratchit. Well, go on!
- BOB (rising reluctantly) It's good of them, sir, to have taken so much trouble to try and entertain us. It's freezing outside. (Moves C.)
- SCROOGE (rising) Tell 'em I'll warm 'em with this ruler - (Snatches it up, and moves to top of desk.) if they don't move on! They don't entertain me - nor did I ask them to come.
- (Voices stop, and there is a knocking on the door.)
- And if that's them asking for money - well, see who it is! Go on! What do you think I pay you for?
- BOB (moving to U.L.) I was just going, sir. (He goes off U.L. and returns almost immediately.) Why, sir, it's Mrs. Fred! (Moves C.)
- (SCROOGE'S NIECE, a young pretty woman, enters.)
- NIECE (coming to BOB'S L.) A merry Christmas to you, Mr. Cratchit.
- BOB And a merry Christmas to you, ma'am.
- NIECE (crossing BOB to SCROOGE'S desk) A merry Christmas, uncle.
- SCROOGE Bah! Humbug!
- (BOB brings a chair for her from R. of cupboard, and places it in front of the desk.)
- NIECE Christmas a humbug, uncle? You don't mean that, I'm sure. (She sits, smiling her thanks to BOB who stands on her L.)
- SCROOGE I do mean it. Merry Christmas, indeed! What right have you to be merry? You're poor enough.
- NIECE (smiling) Well, then, uncle, what right have you to be dismal? You're rich enough.

(BOB laughs.)

SCROOGE Another sound from you, Cratchit, and you'll be looking for a situation. That'll give you something to be merry about.

(BOB hastily returns to his desk and sits, resuming his work.)

Now, niece, state your purpose here. I'm busy.

NIECE Don't be angry, uncle. I came to ask you to dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE Dine with you? I'll see you and your husband at the devil first.

NIECE But why? Why?

SCROOGE Why did you get married?

NIECE (smiling) Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE (disgusted) Because you fell in love! Humbug!
(Takes up pen.) Good afternoon.

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

SCROOGE (writing) Good afternoon.

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

SCROOGE Good afternoon.

NIECE (rising) Well, remember, if you should change your mind, we shall be so glad to see you. (She holds out her hand. SCROOGE ignores it.) Goodbye, uncle.

(There is no movement from SCROOGE. She sighs and moves up C. BOB rises quickly and moves up to her L.)

BOB Let me see you down the path, ma'am. It's slippery.

NIECE How are your family, Mr. Cratchit?

BOB Oh, bobbish, thank you, ma'am. Pretty bobbish. Looking forward to tomorrow, ma'am.

(NIECE crosses him to move U.L. He follows talking.)

Oh, we shall make merry, you know, in our own small way -
(They have gone out U.L. SCROOGE rises, and moves

round the bottom of his desk to fire, looking after them.)

SCROOGE There's another idiot, my clerk. A fellow with fifteen shillings a week talking about a merry Christmas! They're all mad! (Moves back to bottom of desk.) Everybody's mad but me, or I'll retire to Bedlam!

(BOB returns.)

Oh, you've come back to work, have you?

BOB (moving C:) If you please, sir, there's two more ladies asking to see you, sir.

(Two ladies enter U.L. The 2nd LADY carries a small note book. BOB turns to them as they hesitate U.L.)

(To 1st LADY; indicating SCROOGE) That's the principal of the firm, ma'am.

1st LADY Thank you. (Crosses to front of SCROOGE'S desk; followed by 2nd LADY.) This is Scrooge and Marley, I believe?

(SCROOGE inclines his head.)

Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago this very night. (To BOB, who is watching.) Cratchit!

BOB (hastily) Yes, sir. (He returns to his desk, sits and resumes work.)

(SCROOGE moves and sits behind his desk.)

1st LADY Then I have no doubt that his liberality is well represented in his surviving partner. (She sits in the chair by the desk.) At this season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute. Many thousands suffer greatly at the present time, sir. Hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts.

SCROOGE Are there no prisons?

1st LADY (slightly startled) Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE And the workhouses? Are they still in operation?

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