

A DIXIE CHRISTMAS CAROL

by Charles Dickens

Adapted by
Orson Scott Card

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1

OLD JOE, incredibly old, is sitting in silence facing the audience. He has a small writing table next to him; he is holding a quill pen that rests on the paper. ANNIE FLAMMER enters, comes up behind him. She circles him -- he doesn't react. Behind him, she makes faces at him. MRS. DILBER enters with a sack over her shoulder.

DILBER

Is he poorly?

ANNIE holds the current grimace, wheels to face Dilber, then turns back.

DILBER

My laws, what a purty little thing you is.

DILBER sets down bag.

DILBER (Hopefully)

Is he dead?

ANNIE (sniffs the air, grimaces)
He must be breathin' -- it smells like a wet hound dog in here.

DILBER
Talk to him nice, Annie, or you won't get a dime.

ANNIE
Two bits or the time of day, I ain't gettin' neither.

DILBER (gleeful)
You got nothin', didn't you!

Enter BEN WIGGLE, Undertaker.

ANNIE
And how could I? They was always somebody there moanin' an'
cryin'.

WIGGLE
All them folks howlin' like a bunch of cats won't bring him back.
That ol' boy's dead as your old toenails.

DILBER
Dead as a doornail, you mean.

WIGGLE
Lawsy, Mrs. Dilber, ain't we smart today. I say he's dead as your
old toenails, an' I reckon doornails ain't no deader. Huh? Huh?

DILBER
Excuse the underription, Mister Ben Wiggle, sir.

WIGGLE
I say what good is it havin' friends drippin' all them tears on your
coffin. Does the water make him grow?

ANNIE
It does.

WIGGLE scowls.

ANNIE
It makes him grow moldy!

DILBER (laughing unroariously)
Oh, she's as smart as a pig in pants, Wiggle. She put one over on
you!

OLD JOE seizes his ink-bottle and throws it arthritically to the ground. The sound freezes them all, and DILBER looks with fear toward the unmoving figure.

DILBER

Oh, we're sorry sir.

WIGGLE

Yes, sir, we offer you our most deepest appendectomies.

ANNIE

We won't make another peep.

They gather together, sudden allies in the darkness. They wait a moment, then OLD JOE taps his pen. All three leap forward at once, but it's ANNIE that gets the ink-bottle and puts it on the writing-stand. Then MRS. DILBER opens her bag.

DILBER

I didn't get much. Just two old shirts.

ANNIE (outraged)

Where'd you get those? I looked all over!

DILBER

In a bag on the front step. He was given 'em to the poor.

WIGGLE

Yes, *sir*, that's us, and we got 'em.

DILBER

I got 'em!

A tap from the pen. They become quiet, and WIGGLE reads what Old Joe has written

WIGGLE

Four bits.

DILBER

Four bits! (Catches herself, says with an edge) Thank you, sir.

Four bits, oh, that's a magubrious payment for all my hard work.

ANNIE

It's four bits more than I get, 'cause I got nothin', Mr. Joe, an' lucky to get away with *that* much. All them people there.

WIGGLE

Weepin' and moanin'.

DILBER

And cryin'.

WIGGLE

That's weepin'.

ANNIE

So what did *you* get, Ben Wiggle?

WIGGLE

Mr. Wiggle to dogs and little children. I got as much as you, and for the same reason. Also there wasn't nothin' to take. I got to him with his wallet still on him!

DILBER

With his wallet!

WIGGLE

But it was empty as a churchmouse.

DILBER

Empty as a *churchmouse*? Oh, he's a genius, he is.

ANNIE

Somebody beat you to it?

WIGGLE

No, he gave all his money away. He died without a cent on him, and so I'm poor as dirt for another day.

DILBER

I always heard he was a rich man!

WIGGLE

Sure, he *made* money, but it slipped right out of his hands. Gave it all away to every beggar with a teary tale.

DILBER

Him, give away? *I* remember when he wouldn't spit on the sidewalk less'n somebody paid him fifty cents for irrigatin'.

WIGGLE

Yes, ma'am, he's changed. Powerful changed. He died with a smile, they say.

DILBER

I heard of him as a stingy old miser.

WIGGLE

That he was, till a few odd Christmases ago. Then of a sudden he turned from the devil into Father Christmas.

ANNIE

Fine Christmas he's given us.

DILBER

Only way I'll get me a bite of Christmas ham is if I kiss me a pig.

WIGGLE

All thanks to cheerful Mr. Scrooge! Generous Mr. Scrooge.

ANNIE (kneels)

Can't you spare a nickel, Mr. Scrooge, to buy an orphan girl a bowl of grits at Christmastime?

SCROOGE entering.

SCROOGE

Go away! (scornfully) Christmas grits!

WIGGLE

A merry Christmas to you, Mr. Scrooge!

SCROOGE

Humbug! An excuse to take money from an honest working gentleman.

DILBER (smiling)

God bless you, this Christmas!

SCROOGE

Bah!

The three giggle, and retreat to a corner. SCROOGE addresses Joe.

SCROOGE

You, sir, at least you have sense to be silent. Christmas. National give-away day. National rob-the-rich day. National do-your-duty-to-the-lazy-poor day. Humbug!

2

Scrooge takes his place at his desk. Moments later, Cratchit rushes in, hangs his coat on the hook, and sits at his high stool. He opens his account book, dips his pen in the inkwell, and acts for all the world as if he has been at work all morning. SCROOGE looks, up, clears his throat.

CRATCHIT (cheerful)

Morning, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Get to work. You're late.

CRATCHIT (immediately humble)

Two minutes, sir. I'm sorry.

SCROOGE

Getting to be a habit. Maybe it's time to look for someone who *wants* to work.

CRATCHIT

Oh, I want to work, sir.

SCROOGE

Then stop talking and do it.

Scrooge's nephew FRED enters.

FRED

Good morning, Uncle!

FRED offers his hand to SCROOGE, who ignores it. After a moment, Fred rubs his hands together to warm them up. He finds the place chilly in more than one sense. But he speaks with good humor.

FRED

Is this an ice-house? Uncle, your nose is blue.

SCROOGE

Coal is up to a dollar fifteen.

FRED (teasing)

So you've decided to freeze to death. That'll show 'em!

Cratchit laughs -- then turns it into a cough as Scrooge glowers.

FRED

Tomorrow is Christmas day, Uncle Ebenezer. And I've come to wish you a merry one, and say, "God bless you."

SCROOGE (pause)

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

Christmas a humbug, Uncle? You don't mean that.

SCROOGE

I don't say things that I don't mean. Merry Christmas. What right do you have to be merry? You're poor enough.

FRED

Then what reason do you have to be dismal? You're rich enough!

SCROOGE

Bah!

FRED

Don't be cross, Uncle.

SCROOGE

What else can I be, when I live in a world of fools? Merry Christmas! What's Christmas to you but a time of paying debts without money; a time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer? If I had my way, every idiot who goes around saying 'Merry Christmas' would be hung from the top of his own Christmas tree and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!

FRED

Uncle!

SCROOGE

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

FRED

But you don't keep it!

SCROOGE

Let me leave it alone, then! A lot of good it's ever done *you*.

FRED

There's a lot of things that's done me good without making me a penny of profit, Christmas among the rest. But I've always thought of Christmas as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year when men and women, by one consent, freely open their closed-up hearts; and treat people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And there, Uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!

CRATCHIT applauds, then realizes where he is and immediately returns to writing.

SCROOGE

Let me hear another sound from *you*, and you'll keep Christmas by losing your job! (to Fred) You're quite the speaker, sir. I'm surprised you don't run for the Congress!

FRED

Don't be sore at me, Uncle. Come and dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE

I'll see you roasted first!

FRED

Why?

SCROOGE

Why did you marry a *poor* girl?

FRED (simply)

Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE

Because you fell in love! Good morning.

FRED

You never visited me *before* I got married. How can that be your reason now?

SCROOGE

Good morning!

FRED

I want nothing from you. You won't lose a dime by coming. Why can't we be friends?

SCROOGE

Good morning.

FRED

I'm sorry, with all my heart. We've never had any quarrel -- at least *I* haven't. But I gave it a try on account of the season, and I'll keep my Christmas spirit to the last. Merry Christmas, Uncle!

SCROOGE

Good morning.

FRED

And a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE

Good morning!

As FRED exits, he speaks to Cratchit softly.

FRED

Merry Christmas.

CRATCHIT

Thank you, sir. And a Merry Christmas to you, sir.

SCROOGE

That's just what I'm talking about. My clerk, making a dollar fifty a week, and a wife and family, talking about a Merry Christmas. There aren't enough asylums to hold these lunatics.

Mrs. BULLWICK and Mrs. ROCKWELL come to the door and open it. Both are society ladies, but Mrs. Bullwick is the true southern lady, sweet and Christian -- and so eager to avoid conflict that she'll put up with almost any abuse. Mrs. Rockwell, on the other hand, deserves the title "battleaxe," meaning that she speaks her mind -- though always in a ladylike way.

BULLWICK

Scrooge & Marley's, I believe?

SCROOGE looks up, frowns at her, and looks down.

SCROOGE

Yes.

BULLWICK

Do we have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley.

SCROOGE

Marley's dead.

BULLWICK (afraid of having given offense)

Oh, really?

SCROOGE

I had him buried seven years ago tonight, so if he's only joking, he's kept it up pretty well. I was his sole executor, his sole assign, his only friend, and his only mourner.

BULLWICK

Oh, I *am* sorry to hear that.

SCROOGE

I ain't all tore up about it. What are *you* so sorry for?

BULLWICK (confused, but still gracious)

I'm sure that his surviving partner is just as generous as he was.

SCROOGE looks up and stares Bullwick down. Mrs. Rockwell now sees that it's time for her to get involved -- sweetness hasn't paid off.

ROCKWELL

You *are* Mr. Scrooge?

SCROOGE

Who are *you*?

ROCKWELL

Mrs. Wellington Rockwell. And this here is Mrs. John Bullwick. We're from the Ladies Auxiliary of --

BULLWICK (smoothing things over)

At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and homeless, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are doing without common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE

Aren't there any prisons?

BULLWICK (confused)

There's jails in every town, I suppose.

SCROOGE

And the poorhouses? Are they still in business?

ROCKWELL (*she* understands what he's driving at)

Of course.

BULLWICK

Filled to overflowing.

SCROOGE

Oh! I was afraid, from what you were starting to say there, that something had happened to shut them all down. Glad to hear they're still working.

ROCKWELL (irked by Scrooge's attitude)

Some folks might say those places don't give a body much in the way of Christian cheer. That's why we're raising a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it's the time of year when hunger is most keenly felt, and when those with plenty take the most joy in sharing.

She gets ready to write -- with an expression that says he'd *better* contribute.

ROCKWELL

What shall we put you down for?

SCROOGE

Nothing.

BULLWICK

Oh, you wish to remain anonymous?

SCROOGE

I wish to be left alone. I don't make myself merry at Christmas, and I can't afford to put on a picnic for a bunch of slackers. I pay taxes to support the prisons and the poorhouses. They cost enough; and those who are too lazy to earn an honest dollar had better go there.

ROCKWELL

Many can't go there. And many would rather die.

SCROOGE

Then they better well do it, and decrease the surplus population.

ROCKWELL

We're speaking of your fellow man, sir!

SCROOGE

My fellow man, madam, is none of my business. My business occupies me constantly. *I* have no time to interfere in other people's, and I appreciate it when they don't interfere in mine. Good morning.

ROCKWELL (in a huff)

Good morning.

ROCKWELL goes to the door, turns to wait for BULLWICK, who is still trying to think of some way to salvage a peaceful happy outcome. As BULLWICK at last turns to leave, she is stopped by CRATCHIT, who hands her a coin, then quickly returns to his work. BULLWICK is surprised; then smiles and leaves, saying:

BULLWICK

Merry Christmas.

SCROOGE (after a pause)

If you expect me to make that up, you are mistaken. (Pause.) In fact, if you have money to throw away, I must be paying you too much.

Some CHILDREN begin to sing outside the door.

CHILDREN

God rest you, merry Gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay --

With a roar, SCROOGE leaps to his feet, and, brandishing a ruler, runs out the door.
The CHILDREN shriek and run.

SCROOGE

Go away! Don't fill my ears with your obnoxious good cheer!

SCROOGE re-entering.

SCROOGE

Rotten little kids. I can tell already that today is going to be
wretched.

Blackout on Scrooge, up on Old Joe, Dilber, Wiggle, and Annie.

3

DILBER

That's the Ebenezer Scrooge *I* knew!

WIGGLE

How did *you* know him?

DILBER

I used to do his laundry. But he accused me of stealing and threw
me out.

ANNIE

Were you?

DILBER

Was I what?

ANNIE

Stealing?

DILBER

Well what do *you* think? But *he* never caught me. Just fired me
out of pure nastiness.

ANNIE

So how did he change?

DILBER (taunting)

Oh, she wants to hear the story! Look, Mister Ben Wiggle, you done started a tale for children.

WIGGLE

I could do worse....

ANNIE

I'm not a children!

DILBER

No, you're an old woman, all shriveled up.

WIGGLE

They *say* -- so y'all can be sure I ain't making it up -- they say that Scrooge turned his whole life around on that very Christmas Eve.

ANNIE

But if he was so mean, how come he changed?

DILBER

He was scared by a ghost.

WIGGLE

Sure! That's what happened!

DILBER

I was jokin'!

ANNIE

Really? A ghost?

WIGGLE

Four of 'em. But I'm getting ahead of myself. That night when he went home, he saw the first one.

4

SCROOGE

Well, Bob Cratchit, it's six o'clock.

CRATCHIT

Why, so it is, if that don't beat all

SCROOGE (scornfully)

Don't pretend to be surprised. You've been watching the clock all afternoon. You're a good deal quicker to go than you are to arrive. You'll gladly take two minutes of *my* time, but you won't spare a minute of *yours*.

CRATCHIT is ready to go, but stands at the door.

SCROOGE

You'll expect to get all day off tomorrow, I suppose.

CRATCHIT

If it's convenient, sir.

SCROOGE

It ain't convenient, and it ain't fair. If I was to dock you twenty cents you'd think I was mistreatin' you, right?

CRATCHIT smiles faintly.

SCROOGE

But you don't think you're mistreatin' *me* when I pay a day's wages for no work.

CRATCHIT (softly)

It's only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE

A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December. But I reckon you've got to have the whole day. Be here *early* the next morning!

CRATCHIT

Oh, I sure will, sir. Merry Christmas, sir!

CRATCHIT leaves.

5

WIGGLE

So Bob Cratchit took off for home, stoppin' on the way to slide down the ice on Corn Hill twenty times, right among the boys.

ANNIE laughs.

WIGGLE

But Ebenezer Scrooge, not he. He walked home, all right, cussin' the snow and swearing at the beggars. He stopped to eat a greasy dinner in a dirty, dark tavern, then added up the sums in his banker's book till 9 o'clock. Finally he closed the book and went on home. It was once a beautiful mansion, but the neighborhood was all run-down, and Scrooge let out all the lower rooms for offices.

DILBER

I know the place.

WIGGLE

Well, then, I reckon you seen that humongous knocker on the front door. Mr. Scrooge, he'd been seein' it every night for years and never paid it no mind. But as he was opening the door that Christmas Eve, he took him a glance at that knocker and bless me if it didn't look like the face of old Marley, his dead partner.

SCROOGE opens the door, enters, stops, stares at the knocker -- which is Wiggle's face, offered for inspection -- then looks forward again.

WIGGLE (cont)

But when he looked back at it, it was just a knocker again.

SCROOGE looks at it again; this time Wiggle isn't there, so he shrugs, says:

SCROOGE

Pooh!

He walks in, goes to a small table, lights a candle, and starts upstairs. Wiggle is wrapping himself in chains and ropes, and ties a cloth around his head to hold his jaw from going slack.

WIGGLE

The face wasn't pretty. It was a little yellor, and looked pretty peaked, even considering Marley was dead. It wasn't a face you forget real easy, and Scrooge double-locked his door. But it didn't do him no good. Because after a sip of corn mash, there started up a noise in the basement. Chains a-rattlin', heavy footsteps a-comin' up the stairs, gettin' louder and louder.

SCROOGE (trying to dismiss it)
Pooh! (Listens) Pooh! (Listens, then jumps up in fear.) It's *still*
humbug! I won't believe it!

WIGGLE
All the bells in the house started ringing at once, and when the
noise stopped, Scrooge looked up and there was --

6

SCROOGE
Marley!

Lights come up, and WIGGLE is Marley.

SCROOGE
What do you want with me!

MARLEY
Plenty!

SCROOGE
Who are you really?

MARLEY
Ask me who I *was*.

SCROOGE
Picky, ain't you? All right, who *were* you, then?

MARLEY
In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE
Oh. Can you, uh, sit down?

MARLEY
I can.

SCROOGE
Then do it.

MARLEY
You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE
Not a bit.

MARLEY
What proof do you need, beyond your ears and eyes?

SCROOGE

I expect you ain't nothin' but a hallucination, brought on by some undigested barbecue, an overdose of okra, or maybe them day-old sausage biscuits I had for breakfast. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!

SCROOGE starts to laugh but MARLEY rises, moaning and rattling chains as lightning, thunder, and all the bells in the house add to the terror. SCROOGE falls to his knees.

SCROOGE

Marley, I wasn't botherin' *you*, so why'd you come here to bother *me*?

MARLEY

Puny man with your world mind, do you believe in me or not?

SCROOGE

I do, I must! But why do you walk the earth as a spirit, and why do you come to me?

MARLEY

Every man must walk abroad among his fellow men, and his spirit must touch many other souls; and if you don't do that in life, then your spirit is condemned to do it after death. (Cries out.)

SCROOGE

You're in chains.

MARLEY

This is the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I put it on at my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. You think it looks peculiar, Ebenezer? That's only cause you can't yet see the weight and length of your own chain. It was every bit as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have worked hard on making it longer. You're loaded heavy as a pack mule, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE looks around for his chain.

MARLEY

Don't look for it now, leastways not outside yourself.

SCROOGE

Jacob! Old Jacob Marley, say something to comfort your old friend!

MARLEY

I ain't got one danged word of comfort for you. Comfort comes from a place where I can't go, and it gets sent to a different kind of man from you. In life my spirit never left our counting-house -- listen up, boy! -- in life my soul was crushed by coins and buried under account books. And now all the journeys my heart never took lie before me.

SCROOGE

You must have been pretty slow about it so far, Jacob.

MARLEY

Slow?

SCROOGE

Seven years dead, and still the whole journey before you.

MARLEY

I move like the wind, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE

Then I reckon you might have got over a bit more ground.

MARLEY (cries out)

Don't you dare judge *me*, Ebenezer! You will set there in your countinghouse, doing *nothing* --

SCROOGE

I work hard, now Jacob! --

MARLEY

The kind of work you do right now is only *adding* to your debt to life. And to pay it off now, after death, that takes a blame sight longer than it would in life.

SCROOGE

How long?

MARLEY (crying out)

Lo-o-o-o-o-o-ong! I am in debt to the whole world, and how can a bankrupt soul like me ever pay it back!

SCROOGE

But you were always a good man at business, Jacob.

MARLEY

Mankind was my business. And at this time of year, I suffer most. There's a star in the heavens that I never looked up to see. (Begins to moan). Now listen up, Ebenezer! My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE

I will! But don't be too hard on me, Jacob! After all, it's been a long time since we've seen each other --

MARLEY

Not for me. I've sat invisible beside you many a day.

SCROOGE (not the greatest news he's ever heard)

Oh, really?

MARLEY

And that ain't the best part of my punishment, either, watching how you treat people. But I'm here tonight to warn you, to give you a chance and a hope of escaping my fate.

SCROOGE

You were always a good friend to me!

MARLEY

You will be haunted by three Spirits.

SCROOGE

Is *that* my chance and hope?

MARLEY

It is.

SCROOGE

Well then I think I'll pass on this one, thanks.

MARLEY (shaking his chains)

If they don't visit you then you got no hope of shucking off your chains.

SCROOGE

I reckon I don't mind a visit or two, then.

MARLEY

Expect the first to come this dark morning, at the hour of one.

SCROOGE

I don't reckon I could take 'em all at once and get it over with --

MARLEY (shouting him down)

The second will come the next night at the same hour. And the third, upon the next night on the last stroke of twelve.

SCROOGE (scribbling in a notebook)

Twelve.

MARLEY

Ebenezer, my time is up. You ain't never going to see me again.

SCROOGE

Oh, too bad, it's been such a pleasant visit. Don't rush off!

MARLEY

For your own sake, never forget what I told you!

SCROOGE

No, no, I'll never forget it, no sir, not I --

MARLEY snaps his fingers, and SCROOGE freezes. WIGGLE sheds the chain and paraphernalia, and goes back to Dilber and Annie.

7

DILBER

Oh, Wiggle, what a yarn! Bless me, I'd turn about quick enough if you sent me my old husband from the grave.

ANNIE

But Scrooge ain't no different yet. He's just skeered, and if you give him a hot bowl of soup he'd talk himself into being as nasty as he ever was!

WIGGLE

The next ghost'll take care of *that*!

THEY confer, and ANNIE suddenly becomes serious.

ANNIE

Me!

WIGGLE

Why not!

ANNIE

Well, what'll I show him?

WIGGLE

I guess that's up to you, now, ain't it!

ANNIE solemnly steps forward to Scrooge, then turns around. WIGGLE signals her to snap her fingers. She does, and SCROOGE continues the motion he began before Wiggle stopped him. He falls to his knees.

8

SCROOGE

No, I'll never forget it as long as I live. (Regaining control, but still on his knees) Which may not be all that long, if I got to go through this three more times.

The clock strikes one o'clock.

SCROOGE

One o'clock already, why Jacob, we've taken half the --

With a gasp, SCROOGE realizes Annie is not Marley. He backs away.

SCROOGE

Where's Jacob? It's one o'clock. You must be the first of the -- spirits.

ANNIE (Her voice is timid; she smiles shyly)

I reckon I am.

SCROOGE

What are you? Or who?

ANNIE

I'm the Ghost of Christmas past.

SCROOGE

Long past?

ANNIE

No, *your* past.

SCROOGE

Well, what's your business? Get on with it.

ANNIE

Your welfare.

SCROOGE

A good night's sleep might be more helpful than all this visitation.

ANNIE (almost sharply)

Your *rescue*, then.

SCROOGE

Will it be -- hard?

ANNIE

How hard will it be to open the doors to your past? You've hidden it in the dark, and double-locked the doors. (Holds out her hand) I have the keys.

Gingerly, SCROOGE takes her hand. Suddenly, he starts stumbling in place.

SCROOGE

What's happening?

ANNIE

Lift your feet.

SCROOGE

We're flying. Look out, we're going to hit that wall -- how did you do that. Flying over the streets of Greensboro. This is hardly dignified. (Laughs) They look like cockroaches down there!

WIGGLE

They fly into a cloud of smoke from a tobacco factory.

SCROOGE coughs and sputters.

WIGGLE

When they come out of the cloud, the city is gone. Instead, they're soaring over fields and a country lane, with trees tipped with frost in the thin light of early morning.

SCROOGE

Do we have to fly this high? I'm still pretty much mortal, and falling might tend to hurt me more than it hurts you.

ANNIE

Here you are flying, and all you can think of is the fall. Let me touch you here, and you'll be upheld in more than this. (Touches his heart) How did you ever let it get so cold?

SCROOGE

That house --

WIGGLE

The sun throws a sudden light through the clouds, and a house springs out of the woods. A large house, with a dozen gables, dormers, chimneys, all with ribbons of smoke that seems to tie the house to the sky.

SCROOGE

I was born here. I was raised here!

WIGGLE

They walk in. A hall with doors leading off in every direction. A long stairway, and a banister worn smooth by the bottoms of several generations of boys.

SCROOGE

I slid down that banister! My own self!

ANNIE

Hush up and listen.

9

DINAH

Morning, Ma'am. Can Benny come out and play?

SCROOGE'S MOTHER

As soon as he's done with his breakfast.

DINAH

Papa says there's ice on the pond thick enough to skate!

SCROOGE'S MOTHER

Isn't that just perfect for Christmas!

DINAH

Tell Benny to hurry.

SCROOGE

Benny -- that's me.

ANNIE

Do you know the woman's voice?

SCROOGE'S MOTHER

Ebenezer?

SCROOGE

Yes, ma'am?

CHILD SCROOGE (echoing)

Yes, ma'am?

SCROOGE'S MOTHER

Dinah Wick was here. She has skates over her shoulder. Would you like to go?

SCROOGE and CHILD SCROOGE

Oh, yes ma'am!

SCROOGE'S MOTHER

Then a Merry Christmas to you, son! Take your little brother Garold with you; and dress warmly!

SCROOGE and CHILD SCROOGE

Yes, ma'am -- and thank you ma'am.

10

ANNIE

Your lip is trembling, Mr. Scrooge. And what's that on your cheek?

SCROOGE

It's a pimple. Lead on, Spirit.

ANNIE

Don't you know the way?

SCROOGE

I could walk it blind!

ANNIE

Then how did you forget it for so long?

WIGGLE

On wagons and buggies, on foot and on horseback, carrying lamps, bearing gifts, with Merry Christmas on every tongue.

As he speaks, background sound of distant carols, bells, calls and glad cries.

WIGGLE

Lovers, friends, neighbors, strangers -- they are all magi.

SCROOGE

Uncle Wayne! And little Emma Manwaring -- has she never grown up? Emma! Merry Christmas! And Merry Christmas, John Rider! Spirit, why don't they answer?

ANNIE

They're only shadows. Their time is over, and we can't touch them now.

SCROOGE

Of course not. I never *could*. How many Merry Christmases have been spoken in vain! Not all Christmases are merry.

ANNIE

Do you know this school?

SCROOGE

Yes. Empty for the holidays.

ANNIE

Not quite empty. One child is still there. Alone.

Enter CHILD SCROOGE, below.

ANNIE

Why is he alone?

SCROOGE

It's his first Christmas after his mother and brother died. His father won't have him at home now. He's got no place to go. Take me away from here.

ANNIE

What about friends? Didn't anyone invite him for the holiday?

SCROOGE (bitterly)

Merry Christmas, they all said, when they left. Have a Merry Christmas, Ebenezer.

ANNIE

Wasn't there some reason they didn't ask this boy along?

No answer.

ANNIE

Have you forgotten. This boy never *told* them he had no place to go for Christmas. He was too proud to admit his need.

SCROOGE

You're quite the judge, I see. Of *course* it was all his fault.

ANNIE (flustered)

Not *all* his fault. If the others had cared enough....

SCROOGE

They didn't. And never did. Merry Christmas. Take me away from here.

ANNIE

So you'll leave this boy to cry all by himself, just like the others?

SCROOGE

No, Spirit. I'll reach out, and touch him, and say -- somewhere there's somebody as knows what you're worth, boy. Someday they'll be sorry they left you alone.

CHILD SCROOGE bursts into tears

SCROOGE

I can't bear this again. Take me away.

ANNIE

There was a boy singing carols at your door last night -- a lonely boy --

SCROOGE

Enough! Take me away.

WIGGLE

The room gets a year older.

Enter MAGGIE. She is very frail. CHILD SCROOGE is pacing up and down -- picks up a pencil and throws it to the ground.

MAGGIE

Benny!

CHILD SCROOGE whirls, they embrace.

MAGGIE

Oh, my dear, dear brother!

CHILD SCROOGE

How did you come?

MAGGIE

On a coach and four! I've come to take you home!

CHILD SCROOGE

Don't you go pullin' my leg, Maggie!

MAGGIE

No, Benny! I've come to bring you home, home, home!

CHILD SCROOGE

Home --

MAGGIE

For good and all. Home, forever and ever. Father's turned so much happier and kinder than he's been since -- than he's been for ages! Home's like Heaven! He spoke to me so sweet one night when I was going to bed and suddenly I wasn't afraid to ask him another time, even though he told me never to mention it again --

CHILD SCROOGE

Ask him what?

MAGGIE

If you could come home, of course! And he said YES, you could -- and sent me to bring you! And you're to be a man, and you never have to come back here --

CHILD SCROOGE (hugging her)

That's the best news! I been prayin' for an earthquake or a tornado to knock this whole place down --

MAGGIE (hushing him with her fingers)

Oh, of course you didn't wish anything as bad as that. Benny, we'll have all of Christmas together! It'll be the merriest time in all the world!

MAGGIE is dragging him to the door. He grabs her arms and starts dancing in a circle with her.

CHILD SCROOGE

We'll have a Merry Christmas! Aunt Mable's going to kiss us! And Santa Claus won't miss us! Hurray for Merry Christmas! (He stops abruptly.) Wait! My box!

MAGGIE

Well hurry and pack it! The coachman will load it. Oh, hurry! Hurry *up!*

CHILD SCROOGE

God bless you, Maggie. You didn't forget me!

MAGGIE

Course not. And you'll never forget me, neither.

11

ANNIE

She's beautiful

SCROOGE

Ah. Yes.

ANNIE

So frail -- she never was healthy, was she?

SCROOGE

But she had a good heart. She married late and died young.

ANNIE

She left children, I believe.

SCROOGE

One child.

ANNIE

Your nephew, Fred.

SCROOGE

Yes.

ANNIE

You promised her --

SCROOGE (barking at her)

I know what I promised!

Annie turns away, smiling a little. She's getting to him.

WIGGLE

They go on, to South Church Street near the Greensboro railway station, till they stop at a certain warehouse door.

ANNIE

Do you know this place?

SCROOGE

Know it! I was apprenticed here!

ANNIE

Then come in.

12

FEZZIWIG enters.

SCROOGE

Look, Spirit! It's old Fezziwig!

FEZZIWIG

Yo ho, there! Ebenezer, Betty!

YOUNG SCROOGE (19) and BETTY WILKINS (20).

SCROOGE

Betty Wilkins, to be sure! Bless me, yes. There she is. She was about the best friend I had in those days.

WILKINS

You'll dance the polka with me, won't you, Ben?

YOUNG SCROOGE

You know I ain't much for dancin', Betty.

WILKINS

I don't mind if you step on me now and again.

YOUNG SCROOGE

If I dance with anybody, I reckon it might as well be you.

She stands there looking so happy your heart might break.

SCROOGE

Poor old Betty!

FEZZIWIG

Yo ho, boys and girls! No more work tonight! Christmas Eve, Betty! Christmas, Ebenezer! Hilli-ho, Betty! Chirrup, Ebenezer!

Enter three FEZZIWIG girls, preceded by MRS. FEZZIWIG. Each girl kisses Fezziwig -- the men bow. SERVANT-GIRLS, COOKS, ETC., come in below. A FIDDLER comes in above.

FEZZIWIG

Strike up, Fiddler! (off-key) Deck the halls with boughs of holly, fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la! Ah ha! A reel! A waltz! A polka! Oh, Fiddler, I can't bear it! I shall jiggle across the floor! Company!

FEZZIWIG holds out his arm for MRS. FEZZIWIG, and they strut out to dance. Others also dance, solo and in couples.

FEZZIWIG

Ebenezer, what sour devil has possessed your soul? It's positively a sin not to dance on Christmas Eve!

FEZZIWIG pushes YOUNG SCROOGE straight at BETTY. Young Scrooge laughs, grabs Betty, and steps out finely.

FEZZIWIG

May God *not* rest ye, Merry Gentlemen! If a jack here dares to rest, I'll stew him with the goose tomorrow. Supper! No man in Carolina starves tonight as long as there's food on my table! In! In! In! There's cold ham and hot roast and turkey and duck and puddings bigger than your head!

FEZZIWIG fades out as ALL exit. YOUNG SCROOGE escorts BETTY to the door, but then shoos her on in and stays outside. Betty lingers a moment, looking longingly at him. SCROOGE moves around him, gesturing for him to enter.

SCROOGE

In, in, in, you young scoundrel! You heard old Fezziwig!

FIDDLE starts up in the other room.

SCROOGE

Doesn't the fiddle get into your blood, you fool?

MRS. FEZZIWIG ENTERS.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

Ebenezer Q. Scrooge!

SCROOGE

Oh, I see. You're waiting to be coaxed!

MRS. FEZZIWIG

How dare you wait out here when the food's on the table and you skinny as a worn-out bannister.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I'm all right, Mrs. Fezziwig.

SCROOGE (Mimics)

I'm all right, Mrs. Fezziwig.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

Look at your cheeks. White as a ghost. And I know for a fact that Betty Wilkins is pining for a good stout polka with you.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Is she? I wouldn't know about that.

SCROOGE (mimics)

Is she. I wouldn't know about that.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

You're not such a fool as not to know. I'll give you the count of ten, and then I'll have a talk with the master about a prentice with no trace of Christmas in his heart.

YOUNG SCROOGE (feigning reluctance)

All right, then Mrs. Fezziwig.

SCROOGE (mimics)

All right, then Mrs. Fezziwig.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

I knew you'd see sense.

SCROOGE

Him see sense! Not a prayer!

MRS. FEZZIWIG

Ebenezer Z. Scrooge, you'll be the death of me.

SCROOGE aims a kick at YOUNG SCROOGE as he exits.

SCROOGE

Fezziwig! Mrs. Fezziwig! Ah, they was grand folks!

13

ANNIE

A small matter, making these silly people so full of cheer.

SCROOGE

Small! Why, it's in his power to make us happy or unhappy, to make our work a pleasure or a misery. And he chose to make us happy. Douse the lamps and you could see the noonday, if Fezziwig's in the room. (Stops abruptly.)

ANNIE

What is it?

SCROOGE

Nothing in particular

ANNIE

Something, I think.

SCROOGE (wistful)

No. No -- It's just that I'd like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That's all. (Gathering back his grumpy self.) Ah, well, those old days are gone . . . and however warm our hearts were then, it's cold comfort in these days.

ANNIE

The comfort isn't cold. Just the comforted.

Touches his heart.

ANNIE

But I see a speck of progress.

SCROOGE

Of course you know Fezziwig ate up two months' profit on that feast! Or rather, every scoundrel and vagrant in Dixie ate it up. He'd have been better to have spent it on investments, to have a decent dowry for his daughters. They married poor, did you know that? Poor, but to "gentlemen." And today *I*, a tradesman, a mere *prentice*, I could buy or sell them a dozen times on one week's surplus!

ANNIE

Oh, yes, Ebenezer Scrooge. You're *richer* than them, anyway.

SCROOGE

Now we know who's fit for courting and who isn't.

ANNIE

Then I guess you'll be glad to see this Christmas --

14

SARAH enters, followed by YOUNG SCROOGE.

SARAH

My feelings matter very little. To *you*, anyway. Something has taken my place -- and if it can cheer you and comfort you as I would have -- as I tried to do -- well then, how can I begrudge your happiness?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Nothing's taken your place.

SARAH

And I say you worship an idol. A golden one.

YOUNG SCROOGE ("that again")

So if I want to make money, that's a sin, is it? That's just what the rich folks hope all us poor folks believe. They grind us down like dirt under their boots, but let a man raise himself, let a man get a little *uppity*, and everybody's all over him to condemn him for it. All I want is for you to have all that a lady like you deserves!

SARAH

Don't pretend you're doing it for me. You do it because you love the money. And I've had to stand by and watch all your fine dreams fall away, to be replaced by a tawdry lust after gain.

YOUNG SCROOGE

You're throwing them words like sharp knives, ain't you? I remember a time when you had only soft words for me --

SARAH

I fell in love with you when we were both poor, and happy to be poor as long as we were together. We'd both work hard, we said, and in a while we'd improve our fortune -- together. It's you that's changed. When we made our contract, you were another man.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I was a boy.

SARAH

I loved that boy, and he loved me.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I can't expect a woman to understand a man's concerns --

SARAH

Oh, I *understand* you, Ebenezer. Better than you understand yourself. It hasn't caused me any joy.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Well, if you don't want to be around me anymore --

SARAH

Yes, Ebenezer. I release you from your promise.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I wasn't asking for a release!

SARAH

But you were wishing for it! (Hurling words at him:) It wasn't a fair bargain anymore. You counted up all you'd have to give me -- a house, clothing, the cost of raising children -- and all I could ever give back to you was love. You weighed all that money against *love* -- well, love weighs less than a feather in *your* scales.

YOUNG SCROOGE

What are we supposed to do, starve to death while we're looking all dreamy at each other?

SARAH

If you hadn't met me before, you'd never look twice at a poor girl like me today.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Is that so?

SARAH

If you were free of your promise to me, you'd never choose a girl without a dowry. If you married me, you'd come to regret it; and I can bear losing you far better than having you, and having you hate me.

YOUNG SCROOGE

How could I hate you?

SARAH

Yes, how? But I think the pain you feel isn't from love -- it's because it hurts your pride that I should choose to live without you. You'll recover soon enough, Ebenezer. I hope you'll be happy in the life you've chosen, I truly do.

SARAH touches a kiss to his forehead and leaves.

15

SCROOGE (bitterly)

Spirit, take me home. I've seen enough.

ANNIE

Have you? Ain't you a-hankerin' to know what happened to her?

SCROOGE

No! Yes, but Spirit, just *tell* me -- don't make we watch. Was she miserable? Did I wreck her whole life?

ANNIE

Oh, no, Ebenezer; she was miserable only when she was with *you*. Oh, she cried for a couple of days. But pretty soon she was as bright and happy as before she ever met you. She caught the eye of a young weaver, married him, and helped him rise to the head of a big textile company of his own. They had eight children and lived joyful as you please and saw all their children married happily for love. And in all that time, she thought of you only once.

SCROOGE

That often.

ANNIE

It was the Christmas when Marley died; on his way home, her husband saw you through the counting house window. And he told his wife that you were alone. And she thought of you for a moment.

SCROOGE

Did she hate me?

ANNIE

Far from hate.

SCROOGE

Don't tell me that she still loved me?

ANNIE

What, are you crazy? But on that happy Christmas Eve, she took a moment from her joy, and pitied you.

SCROOGE

Spirit, if I asked for water I reckon you'd give me salt. Do you have any idea how much pain you've brought me?

ANNIE

It's pain you chose yourself, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE

I know. (One sob, sitting on the edge of the bed.) Leave me.

She waits.

SCROOGE

Leave me!

16

She goes to him, strokes his head. In a few moments he is asleep. She eases him down on the bed, then turns to the others.

ANNIE

I can't help it. I pity him, too.

WIGGLE

But pity never cured a sick man, and it won't cure *him*.

DILBER

You did real good, Annie.

ANNIE

Y'all are just too kind to me --

DILBER (all business)

Just set still and be quiet now, girl. (To Wiggle:) There's another ghost, ain't there?

WIGGLE

Right. Christmas Present

DILBER (feigning shyness)

But who ever will it be?

WIGGLE

Would *you* do it, Mrs. Dilber?

DILBER (Surprise)

What, little old me?

WIGGLE

Less'n you'd rather not.

DILBER (clutching at his sleeve)

I'll do it. What do I do.

ANNIE

It just sort of comes to you.

WIGGLE

Just do what seems right.

DILBER

Then here I am, and strike the clock one, and give me a mountain of food! Turkeys and chickens and ducks and lambs and beeves and sucklin' pigs; breads and cheeses and candy and cakes; cream and milk and cold mountain water; steaming flagons of chocolate and cider! And lights! And trees, with candles on 'em! And a pile of presents there, and there. Oh, and music! Let the bells of Christmas ring in the distance! And let children laugh!

Offstage laughter. ANNIE joins in.

DILBER

You hear that? I reckon now it's Christmas! It's Christmas today! Now ring one-of-the-morning chimes, and wake old Ebenezer Scrooge!

CLOCK chimes. SCROOGE wakes to sudden silence.

17

SCROOGE

One! Again! I must've slept through the day, and it's time for the next spirit. (Looks around.) Wouldn't you know it. Late.

CHILDREN's laughter.

SCROOGE

What's that?

DILBER starts to laugh.

SCROOGE

It's laughter. The ghost of Christmas Present!

SCROOGE goes to where he can see her. He marvels at the imaginary feast.

DILBER

Ebenezer Scrooge.

SCROOGE

You're the ghost of Christmas Present?

DILBER

I was born tonight, to have twenty lifetimes of joy in one short day!

SCROOGE

And then you die?

DILBER

Never! I live on in Christmas Past; didn't you meet her? They told me you met her. Are we ahead of schedule?

SCROOGE

No, I met her last night.

DILBER

You'll have to bear with me, Ebenezer. I'm still a child, and I have to fill my lungs and empty my head and laugh!

More laughter offstage.

DILBER

I'm just the teeniest bit irresponsible, you see.

SCROOGE (liking her)

I see indeed.

DILBER (Mock somber)

You're the man who called me a humbug.

SCROOGE

Oh. Spirit -- I --

DILBER

Well, I am! I'm a fraud! I'm joy in a world of sorrow, hope in a world of despair. So, Mr. Scrooge (leaning close), Bah! I say, Bah on your humbug!

SCROOGE (Laughing in spite of himself)

And so do I. Christmas Past gave me a strong dose of bad-tasting medicine, but I've begun to see what a fool I've been. So lead on, Spirit, and whatever medicine you give, I'll be grateful for it.

DILBER

Then look, and see the street! The street is the home of the poor,
and a cold home it is. But tonight the walls open wide, and
there's feasting even for the forgotten.

SCROOGE

That man, there! Isn't he freezing?

DILBER

He's got a warmth inside him -- which I admit is partly ale -- but
what a great part of it is me! Don't just stand there. We have a
world to cover!

SCROOGE

What a storm!

DILBER

It's *dang* cold out there. See that hut?

SCROOGE

Yes. But does someone live there?

DILBER

Two families of shepherds.

SCROOGE

Two! In that little pile of twigs?

DILBER

Look inside.

Sound of singing hymns.

DILBER

Those are smiles on their faces, Mr. Bah Humbug.

SCROOGE

What a beautiful song.

DILBER

Nonsense, Mr. Practical. They're all off key, and they're making a
perfect botch of the words.

SCROOGE

Oh, no. It's a cathedral, and there are angels in the throng.

DILBER

Didn't think you'd notice, Mr. Down on Christmas.

SCROOGE

Don't taunt me, Spirit. I already regret every evil word I ever said
about Christmas.

DILBER

Not half enough. But come, I have only a night, and you're wasting it with foolish conversation. Of course, I do talk a bit, too.

PETER CRATCHIT runs in, chasing MATT, whooping and shrieking. They circle the Cratchits' table. MRS. CRATCHIT bustles in, carrying a stack of chipped plates with a pile of cheap tinware on top.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Quiet down, both of you! Set the table, please.

She bustles back out again, as they somberly begin to set the plates out on the table. But whenever they look at each other, they break up laughing.

DILBER

Do you know this place?

SCROOGE

I don't think so.

DILBER

Of course not. Mr. Pooh-On-Christmas. It's the home of Bob Cratchit, your clerk. Never been here, have you?

SCROOGE

I had no idea it was so small.

DILBER

It costs half the wages you pay him, and food and firewood take the other half.

18

PETER hears a noise, runs to the front door.

PETER

Mother! I hear Papa coming!

MRS. CRATCHIT

Oh, dear. The cake will fall, I know it. And Papa home already.

MATT

Oh, it's not Papa!

MARTHA enters, pecks Peter on the cheek.

MARTHA

Sorry, only me!

MRS. CRATCHIT rushes from the kitchen and embraces her oldest daughter.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Oh, Martha. I'm so happy to see you!

HORACE (from kitchen)

The chicken! Momma!

MATT

Hurry!

MRS. CRATCHIT

The chicken, oh dear. Dear dear!

MRS. CRATCHIT rushes out. Peter, Matt, and Martha all stand at the kitchen door, peering offstage.

PETER

It isn't burnt?

HORACE (offstage)

Yes!

PETER

Oh, no!

MARTHA

Quiet, you little think-of-the-worsts! It's golden and perfect.

HORACE (entering from kitchen)

I can taste it from here.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Now the chicken's out of the oven, where's your Papa? And your brother, Tiny Tim. Where are they?

BOB and TINY TIM (singing offstage)

We wish you a merry Christmas! We wish you a merry Christmas!

We wish you a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year!

MATT

Here they come!

MARTHA

Let's surprise them!

MARTHA hides behind a screen made by the bodies of PETER, HORACE AND MATT. BOB CRATCHIT and TINY TIM enter. BOB CRATCHIT tenderly places Tiny Tim on his stool at the head of the table.

BOB

Here we are!

TINY TIM

Now you can start having fun!

BOB

Why, where's our Martha?

MRS. CRATCHIT

Not coming.

BOB

Not coming!

MATT

Had to work!

BOB

No, they couldn't make her stay on Christmas Eve!

MARTHA

Here I am Papa!

BOB

Oh, if you ain't Bre'r Rabbit himself with your tricks!

Another hug.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Food's ready, so wash for table!

Laughter and bustling as Peter and Horace sweep Tiny Tim away.

MRS. CRATCHIT

And how did little Tim behave?

BOB

As good as gold. And better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember, upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.

A brief communication between BOB and MRS. CRATCHIT, when TINY TIM's crutch is heard, and he races in followed by the others, laughing.

BOB

Up to the table, and not another squeak!

The chicken is brought in, with bread and cheese and other things.

BOB

What a chicken! Oh, Mrs. Cratchit, how glad I am I changed your name.

TINY TIM

Grace, father.

BOB

I hadn't forgotten, dear.

ALL how their heads.

BOB

Our father, we are the richest family in the world, for we are seven souls who love each other. Our happiness is more than we deserve, and we thank you. And we thank you for your Son Jesus, He who healed the sick and filled the hungry. If there are any in this city that we can help, lead them to our door, we pray, for we have plenty, and there are many with far less.

DILBER

You're the one they're praying for, you know, cause here you are a-starving, and standing at their door.

BOB

Amen.

ALL echo, and are about to fall to, when MRS. CRATCHIT remembers and shrieks.

MRS. CRATCHIT

The squash!

A melee as the pudding is gone for and brought to the table.

BOB

What a squash!

PETER

Big as Tiny Tim's head, I reckon.

TINY TIM

Well, be careful, then.

MARTHA

We'd never harm a hair of you, Tim.

TINY TIM

Peter, did you get it?

PETER

Sh!

BOB

Get what?

TINY TIM

It.

MATT

Oh, Peter's got a --

MRS. CRATCHIT

Hush all. It's for Peter to tell Papa.

PETER

I have a job, Papa.

BOB

A job!

PETER

I'm going to be a clerk, too. At Cone Mills. And run errands.

BOB (proudly)

Then you're a man indeed, son.

HORACE

Not till he's married.

PETER

Horace!

HORACE

Momma said a man's not a man till he's married!

MATT

Well, Ellie won't leave him alone for long, now.

PETER

I'm being picked on, Papa!

ALL laugh.

BOB

Hot punch, specialty of the house!

HORACE

A toast.

PETER

It ain't Christmas without a toast.

BOB

Well, then -- to Mr. Scrooge! The founder of the feast.

Dead silence.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Founder of the feast indeed. I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast on, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it.

BOB

My dear, the children.

MRS. CRATCHIT

It'd have to be Christmas Eve, I reckon, to drink the health of such a stingy, hard, unfeeling *toad* as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert!

BOB

My dear. Christmas Eve.

MRS. CRATCHIT

I'll drink his health for your sake, and for the day. Not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy New Year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt.

ALL drink half-heartedly, except TIM.

BOB

Tiny Tim.

TINY TIM grimaces at his punch, then sips a little. The OTHERS laugh.

BOB

Well, I see my toast has put a shadow in the room. So let me give you another! A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!

TINY TIM

God bless us, every one!

THEY drain the cups. Then TINY TIM begins to quietly sing "Away in a Manger."

19

SCROOGE

Can't they see how small that pudding is? And that ridiculous little sparrow they call a chicken? The house is too small, the furniture is falling apart.

DILBER

It's warm.

SCROOGE

Reckon it is *that*. Tell me, Spirit. Will Tiny Tim live?

DILBER

That's future. Not my department. But let's see --

DILBER closes her eyes and grimaces. When she opens her eyes again, she looks sadly toward TINY TIM, who is still singing.

DILBER

I see an empty chair in the chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If the future doesn't change, Tiny Tim will die.

SCROOGE

No. Oh, no, kind spirit. He can't --

DILBER

Why not? If he's going to die, let him do it, and decrease the surplus population.

SCROOGE (long pause)

I wish to heaven I'd never said that.

DILBER

So do I. But let's get a move on, boy!

SCROOGE

Can't I hear him end his song?

DILBER

A good many verses to go, and I can't spare the time! Come away, Mr. Humbug.

SCROOGE

Where are we going?

DILBER

Curiosity killed the cat, old man!

20

Burst of laughter. As SCROOGE and DILBER stand on the steps, a group of young women dash by, pursuing a young man holding a lady's shoe. Last in the group is a pretty woman limping with one shoe off.

AGATHA (Fred's wife and the slipperless woman)

Thomas Wyler, give me back my slipper!

Enter FRED below.

AGATHA

Freddie, make him give me back my slipper!

FRED roars and seizes THOMAS by the ankles, upsetting him altogether. Then he retrieves the slipper and gives it to his wife.

FRED

We magi come bearing gifts. Gold, frankincense, and slippers!

ALL laugh and start to break up as AGATHA puts on her slipper.

AGATHA

I'll put pebbles in your tea for this, Thomas!

THOMAS

I'd say she already does, regularly, wouldn't you, Fred?

FRED

Good evening and Merry Christmas, Agatha.

FRED kisses her. (Hug and peck)

AGATHA

How was today? Did you buy the last of the gifts?

FRED

Are the little monsters all tucked in their beds?

AGATHA

I'm sure they'll go right to sleep -- with all this racket down here.

FRED

Ah, but Christmas is for friends! And we're wealthy in them. I invited Uncle to dinner tomorrow.

AGATHA

No! Fred --

FRED

But he turned me down.

AGATHA

That's a relief.

FRED

Now, Agatha.

AGATHA

He's such a deadly man. Why did you even go see him?

FRED

To wish him a merry Christmas. He said that Christmas was a humbug! He believed it, too!

THOMAS

Who said that?

FRED

My Uncle Ebenezer.

THOMAS

Scrooge?

RENA

What did he say?

THOMAS

That Christmas is a humbug.

Laughter as AGATHA goes on.

AGATHA

More shame for him, Fred!

FRED

He's a funny old coot, that's the truth. And not as nice as he might be. But his bad habits carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.

THOMAS

I hear he's rich!

AGATHA

At least Fred always tells me so!

FRED

So what? He doesn't do anything with it. He doesn't make himself comfortable with it. He doesn't even have the satisfaction of thinking -- ha! -- that he's ever going to benefit us with it.

AGATHA

I have no patience with him!

General agreement.

FRED

Oh, I have, I'm sorry for him -- I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his bad temper? Himself, always. Here he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us tomorrow. What's the consequences? He loses a marvelous dinner and dines alone on his own bad humor!

Applause and they laughingly settle into a game as:

DILBER

Is he right? Or not?

SCROOGE

You don't have to throw my morals at me. I get the picture pretty good on my own. But let me stay a minute -- look, they're starting up a game!

The game is "Twenty Questions."

FRED

All right! All right -- I'm think of something!

THOMAS

No fair. Narrow it down -- animal, vegetable, or mineral?

FRED

Definitely animal.

RENA

Is it a bear?

FRED

No.

THOMAS

You don't do it that way, you narrow it down, like this -- is it ferocious?

FRED

Oh, yes. That's two!

AGATHA

Does it live in America?

FRED

Yes. Three.

RENA

Is it in the circus?

FRED

Never. Four.

EDWARD

Does it walk on four legs or two?

THOMAS

How can he answer yes or no to that?

LUCRETIA

I thought it was a very good question.

AGATHA

Does one live in Greensboro?

FRED

Yes.

RENA

In a stable?

FRED

(Bursts out laughing) No!

RENA

What's so funny about that? Do you see it walking around the streets?

FRED

(Suppressing a smile) Yes.

AGATHA

I thought it was ferocious.

LUCRETIA

Is it a lion?

THOMAS

On the streets?

FRED

No.

THOMAS

See?

LUCRETIA

Maybe it escaped.

FRED

You've only got twelve questions.

RENA

Is it a bull? They're ferocious.

FRED

(Laughing) No!

THOMAS

A dog?

FRED

No.

AGATHA

Is it slaughtered in the market?

FRED

Never. (Laughs) But it slaughters others! No, that isn't fair, it'll only mislead you.

THOMAS

Slaughters others? A cat?

FRED

No. I said it would throw you off.

EDWARD

Is it a pig?

FRED

No! Seven left.

THOMAS

Pigs are slaughtered in the market.

LUCRETIA

I saw one once that was ferocious.

AGATHA

Must you know everything, Thomas?

THOMAS

No, but your scoundrel husband is set to slaughter *us*, and I can't bear to see him win. He'd be so smug.

EDWARD

Is it a mule?

FRED

(Whoops, and rolls on the floor with laughter)

EDWARD

Well is it?

FRED

No! Oh, I can't stand it!

THOMAS

I told you he'd be smug.

FRED

I'm not smug. I'm hysterical!

THOMAS

Well, is it displayed for entertainment?

FRED

(Another laugh) No! Five left.

LUCRETIA

Does it growl?

FRED

(Giggles) Yes.

LUCRETIA

(To Thomas) There.

RENA

Does it grunt?

FRED

(Howls) Yes. Three to go!

EDWARD

Is it expensive?

FRED

Terribly.

AGATHA

Does it live in a house?

FRED

Yes. One to go! I've got you!

THOMAS

Not me, yet. Don't anyone ask the last question till we're sure.
(long pause) Ferocious, isn't butchered, grunts and growls, isn't
displayed, walks the streets --

EDWARD

Expensive.

RENA

Not a bear, or a lion.

FRED howls and rolls on the floor.

AGATHA

That's hardly polite, Fred.

FRED ignores her and beats the floor.

RENA

Wait a minute! I know it! I know it! Oh, it's marvelous! You're
a genius. Oh, Fred!

LUCRETIA

What is it?

FRED

Yes, what's your guess?

RENA

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

ALL

Yes! Yes! Wonderful! Perfect!

They ALL applaud, roar with laughter.

AGATHA

I think -- I think it should have counted when someone guessed a
bear!

More laughter, SCROOGE applauding.

FRED

Well, he's given us plenty of merriment, and it would be ungrateful not to wish him well. So I say, a cheer for Uncle Scrooge!

ALL

Bravo! Uncle Scrooge!

FRED

A Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!

SCROOGE

Thank you!

FRED

He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!

AGATHA

And I say, supper's at the table, even if we are not!

EDWARD

Supper!

THOMAS

Do I go alone, or will a woman grace my arm!

ALL exit, THOMAS and RENA last.

THOMAS

How did you figure it out?

RENA

I'll teach you my method someday, though I doubt you'd catch on fast!

THOMAS

My heart is broken.

THOMAS offers her his arm, and they exit laughing.

SCROOGE

Oh, marvelous; oh, merry, merry Christmas! What a night, what a marvelous night.

SCROOGE starts to follow them to supper.

21

DILBER

Where do you think you're going?

SCROOGE

It's Christmas!

DILBER

Every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be hung from his own Christmas tree and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.

SCROOGE

Oh, Spirit, I know it, I was a fool! But now -- it's Christmas!

DILBER

No! Good cheer in you is not enough. You'd wake up in the morning and think it was a foolish dream, and be back to your nasty, miserly, stingy, rude, cold, unkind, abrupt, ill-mannered, foul-humoured self in half an hour.

SCROOGE (petulantly)

I would not!

DILBER

Oh you wouldn't, would you? The third ghost will tell you what you will and will not. I've wasted half the night with you, and I'm done!

Starts to exit.

DILBER

Oh dear!

Returns.

DILBER

I forgot.

Snaps her fingers, and he falls on the bed.

22

ANNIE

Oh, Mrs. Dilber, what a Christmas you make!

DILBER

Was it good?

WIGGLE

Best dang Christmas I ever saw.

DILBER

Well, then, I guess I done all right. What's next?

ANNIE

Christmas future!

DILBER

Go ahead, then!

ANNIE

Who?

DILBER

Why -- Ben Wiggle, who's to do Christmas future?

There is a crash. Old Joe's table has fallen over, and OLD JOE is getting up.

WIGGLE (whisper)

Old Joe.

DILBER (whisper)

What's he doin'?

WIGGLE

He's gettin' up.

DILBER

I can see *that*.

ANNIE

He wants to do Christmas future.

DILBER

Not him.

WIGGLE

Why not?

OLD JOE holds up his hands, and ANNIE puts a long cloth in them. He cowl's it over his head.

DILBER

He looks like warmed over death.

WIGGLE

That's right. Now hush your mouth, girl.

OLD JOE walks toward Scrooge.

23

Dim light up on SCROOGE, snoring. The shape of OLD JOE can be barely seen, standing rigidly. SCROOGE wakes himself up with a loud snort.

SCROOGE (yawns)

How long have I been asleep?

The CLOCK begins to strike. SCROOGE counts.

SCROOGE

Twelve o'clock. Midnight, I guess.

SCROOGE notices OLD JOE, scrambles to far corners of bed with bedclothes gathered up tight.

SCROOGE

Then it wasn't a dream! You -- I beg your pardon -- are you the Ghost of Christmases yet to come?

OLD JOE points the direction to go.

SCROOGE

I reckon you've come to show me things that haven't happened yet. I should have most hope in you, but you're the spirit I fear the most. Won't you speak to me? (pause) Then lead on.

THEY move toward Mrs. ROCKWELL, Mrs. BULLWICK, and Mrs. GILBERT talking and laughing.

ROCKWELL

I can't say I know much about it either way. I only know he's dead. Last night.

BULLWICK

What was the matter with him? I never even heard that he was ill.

ROCKWELL

I never heard he was healthy, either.

GILBERT

What about the one thing anybody really cares about? What has he done with his money?

BULLWICK

I haven't heard.

ROCKWELL

He didn't leave it to *me*. That's all I know.

Laughter.

GILBERT

I expect it'll be a cheap funeral. Won't have to have a big room, since I can't think of a soul who's fixin' to go.

BULLWICK (ever the sweet one)

We could make up a party, and volunteer.

GILBERT

I don't mind going if they serve lunch. But it better be a good feed, or it ain't worth the trip.

BULLWICK

Well, I'm going, lunch or no lunch. It's only decent.

ROCKWELL

Come to think of it, you may have been his best friend, Mrs. Bullwick. I remember clearly one time when he nodded to you when we passed him on the street. (Laugh.) Good night. And Merry Christmas!

BULLWICK & GILBERT

Merry Christmas!

THEY disperse.

SCROOGE

Why did you show me this, Spirit? Those ladies ain't got much sympathy for the dead, I s'pose, but what does that have to do with me?

24

OLD JOE points. ANNIE is just entering to see an empty chair. She sees OLD JOE's hat, puts it on, sits in his chair. MRS. DILBER enters.

DILBER

Old Joe, have I got a bundle of rags for you! You're gonna pay triple for these, I reckon -- Annie, you nasty girl, ain't you got no manners? I slave upstairs with my arms full, hopin' to get paid for what I found, and it's only you playin' Santa Claus in Old Joe's chair!

ANNIE

He isn't here!

DILBER

You don't say! Where is he, then?

ANNIE

He got run over by the Danville train.

Enter WIGGLE.

DILBER

Then where am I s'posed to sell these things?

WIGGLE

Since when do you believe a lyin' deceitful little brat like her? If a train ever hits him, it'll probably de-rail and Old Joe'll just walk away.

ANNIE

I think Old Joe's been dead for years. He just keeps walking around outta meanness!

WIGGLE

If meanness never died, I wouldn't've got me a gold watch off the corpse I dressed out today. He was the nastiest man in Greensboro, and Greensboro's got a fair share of nasty men.

DILBER

Whoever do you mean?

WIGGLE

You know who I mean. That's right, Mrs. Dilber, I saw you and Annie both skulking outside the house of death. Buzzards you are.

DILBER

And you're a little bluebird, I suppose?

WIGGLE

I come by my wages as a honest undertaker! In fact, I do such fine work, I know my customers'd give me a tip, iffen they could - and since they can't, I do 'em a favor, and take the tip myself. (Tosses the watch up and catches it.)

ANNIE

You're a thief in wolf's clothing!

DILBER

Such a *bright* child.

WIGGLE

What I want to know is, what did y'all get?

DILBER

What's it to you?

WIGGLE

I'm not here to pick holes in you. If he ever made a single friend in his life, he would've had a whole bunch of people by his coffin, weepin' and moanin', and we never would've got a thing. But he didn't have him a single friend, on account of he never done good for a soul in his miserable cantankerous life. But at least the stuff he left behind is doin' good for *us*. Who knows? Maybe we're pavin' his way to heaven!

ANNIE

Talk talk.

DILBER

You are the soul of charity.

WIGGLE

So what've you got in the bag?

DILBER

I reckon I'm Santa Claus! Here's a toy.

ANNIE

You took his blanket!

DILBER

He's cold with it or without!

WIGGLE (holds the blanket away from himself)

He didn't die of anything catching, did he?

DILBER

Do you think I'm dumb or something? I wasn't so fond of his company I would've got near him if he was *catching*!

WIGGLE

I see you got some of his shirts, too.

DILBER

Only four, but they're hardly used. I think he only wore the one.

WIGGLE

And I got *that*! (Produces it) They was going to waste it!

ANNIE

What do you mean *waste* it?

WIGGLE

They was going to put it in the ground with him.

DILBER

So what's he gettin' buried in?

WIGGLE

I put one of my old shirts on him!

ANNIE

Now that's *really* lowdown.

WIGGLE

What do you mean? I gave him the shirt off my back!

ANNIE

Look -- she got his curtains!

DILBER

Yes, and I reckon they'll bring a good price!

WIGGLE

You mean you took down the bed-curtains, rings and all, with him lyin' there?

DILBER

Yes. Why not?

WIGGLE

You were born to make your fortune, Mrs. Dilber!

ANNIE

I've got better than either of you! Under his floorboards I found this. (Hold out a banknote)

WIGGLE

A dollar bill. Not bad, for a little girl. But I got me a lot more than that in bric-a-brac.

ANNIE

Are you such a fool you think I'd show you more than one?

DILBER

There's *more* money?

WIGGLE

My dear sweet little orphan girl who doesn't have a soul in the world to protect you, let me help you count it.

DILBER

Don't let him touch it, Annie, or you'll never see it again. *I'll* guard it for you.

WIGGLE

And suddenly you're an angel from heaven, is that it?

DILBER

I ain't sayin' I'm no angel, but I sure ain't the sort that'd steal from a helpless little orphan girl!

As they quarrel, ANNIE steals out the door -- with Dilber's bag.

WIGGLE

Am I a thief? I, whose hands ain't never done no harm, but only helped people on their way to eternal peace?

DILBER

Peace and poverty! You're a thief and a nincompoop!

WIGGLE

Who you calling names, unh? Who you calling a nickum -- nookupim --poopumkik -- thief?

DILBER

Oh! My bag! Where is it?

WIGGLE

With that sweet little orphan girl you love so dear.

DILBER

Annie, that little brat! Where *is* she?

WIGGLE

Down the stairs and halfway to Winston by now.

DILBER (bellowing as she races out the door)

Thief! Stop her! I've been robbed! Help. Help!

She is gone, and WIGGLE rolls laughing on the floor. SCROOGE turns away.

SCROOGE

I see, Spirit. The case of this unhappy, friendless man might be my own. My life tends that way now. But if there is any person in this city who feels emotion because of this man's death, show me that person, please.

The SPIRIT points as a young woman comes in to greet her worried mother.

25

AGNES

Good evening, Mama.

CAROLINE

Is it good or bad?

AGNES

Some folks might call it that.

CAROLINE

We're bankrupt, then?

AGNES

No, Mama. They's still hope.

CAROLINE

There's always hope, I suppose. If *he* relents. If *he* learns charity. But there's miracles in the streets again if *he* turns decent.

AGNES

He won't turn decent or anything else. He's dead.

CAROLINE is overwhelmingly relieved.

CAROLINE

May the Lord forgive me! But I'm glad to hear it! Who do we owe the money to now?

AGNES

I don't know. By the time somebody comes to collect, we'll have the money. And even if we don't, I reckon *nobody* could be as merciless a creditor as he was. We can sleep easy tonight, Mama.

AGNES and CAROLINE laugh and embrace and then exit.

26

SCROOGE

Let me see some tenderness connected with a death, Spirit, or my repentance will turn to terror.

A VOICE is heard, then lights up on the CRATCHIT FAMILY, except for Bob and Tiny Tim.

PETER (reading)

And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them.

MRS. CRATCHIT (pretending not to cry)

Oh, my. This close work hurts my eyes. Ah, they're better now. I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for all the world.

HORACE

He's late.

MATT

I think he's been walking a little slower than he used to ever since --

PETER

These last few days, anyhow.

MRS. CRATCHIT

I've known him to walk with . . . With Tiny Tim on his shoulder I've known him to walk real fast.

HORACE

Me, too, Mama! All the time!

MARTHA

So have I.

MATT

Me, too.

MRS. CRATCHIT

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

MRS. CRATCHIT hurries to meet him. BOB comes in and ALL hug him tenderly, silently.

BOB

Good evening, my dears. Oh, that's good work. That's fine work. It'll be done in plenty of time, long before Sunday.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Sunday! You went today, then, Robert?

BOB

Yes, my dear. I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I'd take my walk there every Sunday. My little, little boy. (Breaks down.) My little boy.

MRS. CRATCHIT (suddenly strong)

My dear.

BOB sits down, and calms himself.

BOB

I'm sorry. A warm fire melts me a little, I guess. Did you set the fire, Peter?

PETER

I did, Papa.

BOB

Well, you were wise to have a good, big one. Isn't the house warm? And on such a cold Christmas Eve. Fine words will be said on Sunday, my dears. But these are the only words that count: "I am the resurrection and the life."

MATT

What about: "Suffer little children to come unto me"?

BOB (giving him a hug)

Those are good words, too.

HORACE (getting a hug on the other side)

Christmas was always Tiny Tim's favorite time of year.

BOB

Do you know who I saw today? Of all people, Mr. Scrooge's nephew. I reckon I ain't seen him but once, but he recognized me on the street. And seeing how I looked just a little down, you know, he asked why I wasn't happy at Christmas time. I told him our sorrow, and he said, "I'm right sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit, and right sorry for your good wife." By the way, how did he know that?

MRS. CRATCHIT

Know what?

BOB

Why, that you're a good wife.

PETER

Everybody knows that.

BOB

Very well said, my boy. Anyway, Scrooge's nephew, he says, "You just let me know if I can do anything for you," and he give me his card and he says, "That's where I live. Please come see me." Now, it wasn't for the sake of anything he might do for us, because we're not in want -- he just has kindly ways. He really seemed as sorry as if he'd known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us.

MRS. CRATCHIT

I'm sure he's a good soul!

BOB

Since he works at the mills, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he started looking out for Peter, and maybe help him get on in his career.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Did you hear that, Peter?

MATT

And then Peter will get married and set up for himself.

PETER

Get along!

BOB

Likely as not, one of these days, though I reckon there's plenty of time for that, Matt. But however and whenever we do part, as families are meant to do, I'm sure we'll none of us forget poor Tiny Tim, or this first parting that there was among us?

ALL (ad lib)

Never, father. I'll never forget. We'll always remember.

BOB

And I know, my dears, that when we remember how patient and how mild he was, we won't get to quarreling among ourselves, and forget our Tiny Tim in doing it.

ALL (ad lib)

No, father. Never.

BOB

Then I'm happy. I'm very happy.

BOB hugs Matt and Horace as MRS. CRATCHIT takes Peter's and Martha's hands.
DIM OUT.

27

SCROOGE

It's kind, sweet people that folks mourn for when they die. And even in dying, this little boy brought a kind of joy to his family. I have learned much, Spirit. But I have to know something more. Couldn't you let me know who was that man who died without a friend in the world?

OLD JOE points.

SCROOGE

A cemetery. This is where he's buried, now? The mist makes the stones look like debris floating on a lake. Is that what we are, Spirit? Or can we change? Can a man like me change?

OLD JOE points.

SCROOGE

Spirit, before I read that headstone, you've got to tell me -- are these things we've seen the future that *must* be, or only the future that *might* be? I mean, if a man should change in his heart, couldn't he change his future?

No answer. SCROOGE approaches the stone.

SCROOGE

No, Spirit! Oh, no, no! It can't be me that's buried here!

OLD JOE points at Scrooge and at the tomb.

SCROOGE

Spirit, listen to me! I ain't the man I was. I will not *be* the man I would have been! Why did y'all show me all this, if I got no hope!

OLD JOE raises his arm. SCROOGE is standing by his bed.

SCROOGE

Good spirit, tell me I can still change this future you've shown me! I'll honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year. I'll live in the Past, Present, and Future. I won't shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I can wipe away the writing on this stone!

SCROOGE catches Old Joe's hand, and a brief tug-of-war takes place. OLD JOE finally frees his hand, snaps his fingers, and storms away. SCROOGE collapses on the bed as OLD JOE casts away his cowl and resumes his seat. THE OTHERS go to Scrooge, cover him, then come back.

28

ANNIE

So he did change.

DILBER

We *knew* he did.

WIGGLE

That's why *we* ain't what Scrooge saw *us* be, neither.

ANNIE

But what happened? If the future has changed, what happened to Tiny Tim, and Bob Cratchit, and Fred and Agatha, and everyone. And was Scrooge kind and happy --

DILBER

Listen to this girl!

WIGGLE

Now don't you go telling me *you* don't want to know!

DILBER

What if I do?

ANNIE

Tell us, Ben Wiggle.

WIGGLE

Then we'll have it be morning.

WIGGLE snaps his fingers, and SCROOGE leaps from his bed.

29

SCROOGE

I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future! The spirits of all three will dwell within me!

Looks around.

SCROOGE

O Jacob Marley! I'm still alive! Heaven and Christmastime be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees!

SCROOGE holds his bed-curtains.

SCROOGE

My bed-curtains. They ain't tore down. They're here, and the future can still be changed. And I'll change it. I will! I don't know what to do. I'm as light as a feather, I'm as happy as an angel, I'm as silly as a schoolboy. A Merry Christmas to everybody! A Happy New Year to all the world! Boy howdy! Whee-haw!

Putting on his shoes.

SCROOGE

I don't know what day of the month it is! I don't know anything.
My mind's as blank as a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd
rather *be* a baby.

CHURCH BELLS ring.

SCROOGE

Church bells ringin'. Then today -- today --

Runs to a window, calls to an URCHIN below.

SCROOGE

What's today, girl!

URCHIN

What?

SCROOGE

What's today, my fine young lady?

URCHIN

Today? Don't you know? It's Christmas Day!

SCROOGE

Christmas Day. I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in
one night. They can do anything they like! Of course they can.

Hey, young lady!

URCHIN

Hey.

SCROOGE

Do you know the butcher shop, one street up, at the corner?

URCHIN

I reckon I do!

SCROOGE

An intelligent girl! A remarkable girl! Do you know whether
they've sold that big old ham that was hanging up there? Not the
little one, the *big* one.

URCHIN

You mean the one as big as me?

SCROOGE

What a delightful girl. It's a pleasure talking to her. Yes, little
lady!

URCHIN

It's hanging there now.

SCROOGE

It is! Well, go and buy it.

URCHIN

You been drinkin' or what?

SCROOGE

No, no, I mean it! Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, and I'll give 'em directions on where to deliver it. Come back with the butcher and I'll give you a quarter. Come back in less than five minutes, and I'll give you fifty cents!

URCHIN

Yes, *sir!*

SCROOGE

I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's! He won't have the foggiest idea who sent it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!

SCROOGE goes down to the door, and looks at the knocker.

SCROOGE

Hey, you old door knocker. I reckon I'm going to love you as long as I live! You got an honest face, and that's the truth. Oh, here's the ham! I reckon that must've come off *two* hogs.

SCROOGE exits.

WIGGLE

After he sent the ham off to Cratchits' he took off walking --

SCROOGE puffs on and runs into BULLWICK and ROCKWELL.

BULLWICK

Pardon me --

ROCKWELL

I beg your pardon!

SCROOGE

My fault, my fault! I'm blundering around like a boy today --
Why, you're the ladies who came to my office yesterday! How do
you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you
to be collecting money for such a worthy cause. A Merry
Christmas to you, ladies!

ROCKWELL

Mr. *Scrooge*?

SCROOGE

Yes, that's my name, and it ain't a pleasant one to you, I can see.
I ask your pardon. And I hope you'll have the goodness to put
me down for --

SCROOGE whispers to them.

BULLWICK

Lord bless you!

ROCKWELL (ever suspicious)

Mr. Scrooge, are you *serious*?

SCROOGE

Not a penny less. I'm including a great many back payments in
that total, I can promise you. Will you do me that favor?

BULLWICK

My dear sir, I don't know what to say to such munificence --

SCROOGE

Then don't say a thing. Just come and see me. Will you come
and see me?

BULLWICK

We will.

ROCKWELL

And thank you.

SCROOGE

I'm in *your* debt. What a pleasure to repay. Merry Christmas,
ladies!

ROCKWELL

Has he lost his mind? That's more than all the rest combined.

BULLWICK

If he's crazy, may the good lord make us all lunatics. (Grabs
Rockwell's hands.) Merry Christmas!

BULLWICK and ROCKWELL exit.

WIGGLE

And then a knock at the door at nephew Fred's house.

AGATHA

Who could it be? Do answer it, Fred.

FRED

Probably a beggar.

AGATHA

Now, Fred, don't give more than we can afford!

FRED opens the door on Scrooge.

FRED

Uncle Ebenezer!

SCROOGE

Fred! Merry Christmas! May I come in?

FRED

Of course -- I -- I was confused, you see, -- I --

SCROOGE

I was the last person you ever thought to see on these steps, is that it? Well, I'm surprised, too. But I've come, and now where's that dinner you told me about?

FRED

Upstairs. We just sat down!

SCROOGE

Lead me to it. I'm starving.

SCROOGE crosses past Fred, but Fred catches his shoulder, holds out his hands in greeting.

FRED

Uncle Ebenezer. Welcome!

SCROOGE (embraces him)

Well come indeed. And about time. I don't believe I ever met your lovely wife.

FRED (as they exit)

Agatha! You'll never guess who's come to dinner, after all.

FRED and SCROOGE exit.

WIGGLE

And he had a Merry Christmas indeed.

ANNIE

But, Ben Wiggle, that can't be the end!

WIGGLE

Patience, Annie Flammer. The next morning he got to the office early, and sat there waiting, watching the clock. At eight o'clock Bob Cratchit wasn't there, nor at five after, nor at ten. Not till eight-fifteen did Bob Cratchit come.

CRATCHIT scurries in, and without taking off his coat, starts to scribble furiously.

SCROOGE

Good evening.

BOB

Good morning, sir.

SCROOGE

I say good evening. Or should it be good *night*? What do you mean coming in this hour of the day?

BOB

I'm very sorry, sir. I *am* a little bit late.

SCROOGE

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

BOB

It's only once a year. It won't happen again. I was making merry, yesterday, sir, and we stayed up late, and I overslept this morning, and --

SCROOGE

Now I'll tell you what, my friend. I'm not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore -- and therefore -- I'm going to raise your salary!

BOB is dumbfounded.

BOB

Say what?

SCROOGE

A Merry Christmas, Bob! A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I've given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary, and help your struggling family, and we'll discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a plate of barbeque. Now make up the fires, and buy another coal shuttle before you dot another *I*, Bob Cratchit!

BOB

Yes sir!

BOB exits, re-enters.

BOB

Thank you, sir!

BOB exits and SCROOGE laughs and laughs as the lights go down on him.

30

WIGGLE

And Tiny Tim is still livin', Annie, even though Scrooge himself has passed on to his reward -- but as *we* know all too well, he died with more friends than any other man I ever heard of.

DILBER

Ben Wiggle, you're a master.

WIGGLE

I reckon it was a pretty good yarn.

ANNIE

And it's true, too.

WIGGLE

Sure enough, Annie, every word!

DILBER

Well, it makes up in cheer for what I lack in cash, so I thank you kindly.

OLD JOE stamps. THEY turn to him. He fumbles a bag out of his coat, and fishes for several bills. He hands two to each of them.

DILBER

Ten bucks!

WIGGLE

Two fivers! Oh, sir. If that ain't the nicest surprise!

DILBER

Surprise surprise surprise, it's Christmas after all! Good-bye!

WIGGLE

Good-bye! Oh, open wide your doors, Greensboro, a rich man is on his way!

DILBER and WIGGLE exit. ANNIE exits, too, but stops herself, runs back to Old Joe, and hugs him.

ANNIE

Merry Christmas. And God bless you, sir!

ANNIE kisses his cheek, and exits, running. OLD JOE sits alone, nodding until the lights go out.

end