

A CHRISTMAS CAROL, A New Version for the Stage
was first presented at the Hilton Head Playhouse on Hilton
Head Island, S.C., on November 25, 1988.

CAST

Anthony Sears . . . Theater Manager / Fred / Fan's Husband /
Undertaker's Man
John David Rose Charles Dickens / Businessman
Travis McKinley Ebenezer Scrooge
Kim Nichols Banks Flower Woman /
Ghost of Christmas Past
Rebecca Gordon Girl / Miss Fezziwig 1
Scott Allen Little Brother / Student / Ignorance
Julie Hahn Mother / Woman in Black / Party Guest /
Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come
David Boles Blind Beggar / Ebenezer / Old Joe
Porter Thompson . . . Shopkeeper / Fezziwig / Businessman
Joseph Urato Bobby / a Miss Fezziwig beau / Warden
Jim A. Choate Bob Cratchit
Sandy Banks . . . Gentleman 1 / Ghost of Christmas Present /
Businessman
Mike Bonavia Gentleman 2 / Bill / Party Guest
Adam Lowery Street Boy / Student / a Miss Fezziwig beau
Welborn Ferrene Young Husband / Dick Wilkins
Nat Gerhart Jacob Marley / Party Guest / Warden /
Businessman
Leon Gilbert Schoolmaster / Party Guest
David Drane Young Scrooge
Amanda Walling Fan / Want
Kim Taulbee Student / Martha Cratchit
Annette Gilbert Mrs. Fezziwig

Affectionately dedicated to the Self Family Arts Center,
and especially to Dallas, whose talent and creativity
contributed immeasurably to development of this script.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

A Play in Two Acts
For 11 Men, 6 Women, 4 Boys, 2 Girls
(expandable to as many as 25-30 actors)
plus extras

CHARACTERS

GENERAL MANAGER OF THE THEATRE
CHARLES DICKENS
EBENEZER SCROOGE, surviving partner of Scrooge & Marley
FLOWER WOMAN
GIRL
LITTLE BROTHER
MOTHER
BLIND BEGGAR
SHOPKEEPER
LONDON BOBBY
BOB CRATCHIT, Scrooge's clerk
FRED, Scrooge's nephew
GENTLEMAN 1
GENTLEMAN 2
STREET BOY
WOMAN IN BLACK
YOUNG HUSBAND (Buckworthy)
JACOB MARLEY, Scrooge's partner; a ghost
THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST
SCHOOLMASTER
YOUNG SCROOGE, age 10
FAN, Ebenzer's sister, age 11-12
FEZZIWIG
MRS. FEZZIWIG
THE MISSES FEZZIWIG (1, 2, and 3)

Karyn Pagano Miss Fezziwig 2
Rachel TeBrake Miss Fezziwig 3
Matthew Hill a Miss Fezziwig beau / Peter Cratchit
Patrick Wallen.. a Miss Fezziwig beau / Belle's Husband /
Businessman
Joel Kay a Miss Fezziwig beau
Gladys Gordon Cook
Jennifer Asnip Belle
Laurie Lee Durham Belle's Daughter
Kate Durham Sara
Samantha Camelford Party Guest / Young Wife
Elizabeth Berkshire Mrs. Cratchit
Hallie Pitkin Belinda Cratchit
Darius Bratsafolis Tiny Tim
Peggy Dunnagan Laundress
Heather Riekels Charwoman

PRODUCTION STAFF

Directed by Dallas Dunnagan
Setting and Lighting Jeff Leonard
Costumes The Clothes Works
Musical Score Mel Marvin, Larry Mercer
Musical Director, Keyboards Larry Mercer
Choreography Julie Hahn
Stage Manager Jacque Moore
Costume Coordinator Elizabeth Berkshire
Properties Master Sue Clark

Production funded in part by The South Carolina Arts
Commission.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

AT RISE: Curtain is up when audience enters. Downstage we see a velvet-padded lectern for the evening's star performer. THEATER MANAGER enters, surveys the audience, checks the lectern, etc.

THEATER MANAGER. Ladies and gentlemen—here now—as part of his second American tour—the management of the theater is proud to present the great English novelist, Mr. Charles Dickens.

(DICKENS enters. White tie, tails. He carries a book. He gets applause and expects it. He opens the book and prepares to read. He milks the moment—he is a master of timing.)

DICKENS. Good evening. Tonight I shall read what has proved to be one of my most popular tales. It was first published in my *Christmas Book* for the year 1844. A *Christmas Carol*—Stave One. "Marley's Ghost." *(Now he begins his dramatic and well-rehearsed reading.)*

Start Here —> Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. There was no doubt whatever about Marley. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge

signed it. And Scrooge's name was good for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was dead as a doornail. Scrooge knew he was dead. Of course he did. Scrooge and he were partners for years. Scrooge was his sole executor, sole administrator, sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnized it by concluding a favorable contract.

End Here ———>

(Claps and signals—sign reading SCROOGE AND MARLEY flies in.)

DICKENS. Scrooge never painted out old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterward, above the door. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge and sometimes Marley but he answered to both names—it was all the same to him.

(Music begins. Lights are fading up.)

DICKENS. On the day in question—of all the good days in the year, on a Christmas Eve—it was cold, bleak, biting weather. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole. *(Lights candle on BOB CRATCHIT's desk.)* It was late—and candles appeared in the windows of offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air.

(A bell chimes six times—6-note motif for "God Bless Us, Ev'ry One." DICKENS moves into the background as an observer. Music swells as lights fade up on a street in Victorian London. It's a drab street, ugly with

poverty. LONDONERS enter in small groups; they freeze for a tableau. SCROOGE enters and crosses on his way to his office. He confronts a FLOWER WOMAN. She offers him a small white flower. He dismisses her and goes on. A GIRL with packages is teased by her LITTLE BROTHER, trying to get her to drop them. MOTHER boxes his ears.)

MOTHER. Behave yourself or Mr. Scrooge will get you while you sleep!

(SCROOGE appears again and stands admiring the sign. A BLIND BEGGAR with a cane and tin cup approaches.)

SCROOGE. Keep your distance—keep your distance! *(Seizes his cane.)* I've no money for homeless beggars.

(Throws the cane. Without it, BEGGAR falls. He struggles up and flees. LONDON BOBBY and SHOPKEEPER have been watching.)

BOBBY. He's a heartless old sinner, ain't he?

SHOPKEEPER. Aye, he's a cold 'un, that Mr. Scrooge. Ever notice how the ice in him freezes up his features? He chills his office in the dog days, an' he don't thaw it so much as one degree at Christmas. Cold as a glacier, that's him.

(Now the office is lit. It consists of two spaces, an inner for SCROOGE, an outer where BOB works at his desk, a long white muffler around his neck. The candle burns

it. Some ledgers are piled up—SCROOGE sits on these instead of a chair. He uncorks bottle and swigs.)

SCROOGE (*braced up*). Ah. Better. Shameful to be rattled by a lot of humbug from your stomach. (*He hangs his hat and overcoat on a peg, unfastens cravat. A distant crash and moan startle him.*) Did I bolt the door? (*He exits for a moment.*) Double-locked—all secure.

(But he's spooked. He darts looks around him as he strikes a match and lights a candle. He comes down-stage and mimes checking the locks on a window and pulling the drapes across. Then he hangs up his vest and cravat and tucks his shoes under the bed. The wind begins to moan. SCROOGE puts on his slippers from under the bed. He hears another crash and a rattle of chains and runs and hides behind a curtain. After a moment he comes out again. He struggles into his dressing gown.)

SCROOGE. A nice bowl of gruel—that will settle things down.

(He shuffles off and returns with a bowl and spoon. He puts on a nightcap and sits with the bowl. He is raising the spoon to his lips when suddenly the bell rises straight up off the table, hanging in the air and ringing furiously. SCROOGE throws his spoon in the air.)

SCROOGE (*a wild cry*). Haaahhh! (*Other bells ring, jangling loudly. SCROOGE covers his ears.*) More humbug. This isn't happening. (*And indeed, the clangor fades and*

the floating bell lowers and quietly settles on the table. SCROOGE hastily finds his spoon, gulps his gruel and blows out the candle. He jumps into bed and pulls up the covers. Silence for a moment. Then, a huge crash. SCROOGE sits up, terrified. I bolted that door! Who's there? (*And now we hear strange sounds coming closer. Shuffling feet—and rattling chains. Music underscores. SCROOGE gets a determined look on his face, creeps from bed and picks up his cane.*) Come on. I'm ready for you. Who—?

(The apparition shuffles into view. It's MARLEY—or rather, his ghost. The same face we saw before. Now his pigtail is visible; and his waistcoat, trousers, boots. Chain is wrapped around his waist, and drags behind him like a tail. This chain looks like a charm-bracelet decorated with "cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses.")

SCROOGE. Stop. (*MARLEY obeys.*) What do you want of me?

MARLEY (*a ghostly echo in his voice*). Much.

SCROOGE. Who are you?

MARLEY. Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE. You're mighty particular for a ghost. Tell me.

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

SCROOGE (*turning away*). It's humbug. The supper again. (*Covers a burp.*)

MARLEY. Why do you doubt your own senses?

SCROOGE. Because little things stir 'em up. A slight disorder of the stomach makes 'em play tricks. (*Advancing on him.*) You aren't real, you're an undigested bit of

<----- Start Here

beef—perhaps a blot of mustard. A crumb of cheese. There's more of gravy than the grave about you—whatever you are. (*MARLEY lets out a loud cry and rattles his chains. SCROOGE falls to his knees, his temporary bravado gone. Crawls under bed to hide. From under bed:*) Mercy! Stop this! Dreadful apparition—why do you torment me?

End Here ---->

MARLEY (*thundering*). Do you or do you not believe in me? (*As he speaks, foot of bed rises and shakes, revealing SCROOGE.*)

SCROOGE (*hands clasped*). I do. Oh, yes! Now please—tell me. (*Stands.*) Why do spirits walk the earth tonight? Why do they come to me?

MARLEY. It is required of every human being that the spirit within him must walk abroad among his fellow men—travel far and wide. If that spirit does not go forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. Doomed to wander through the world and witness what it cannot share—but might have shared on earth.

SCROOGE. But you are chained. Why?

MARLEY. I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link and yard by yard. I put it on and wore it of my own free will. (*Rattles the chain.*) Is the design so strange to you? (*SCROOGE makes a strange gargling sound—too frightened for words. MARLEY points accusingly.*) You wear the same chains.

SCROOGE (*checking to see*). Chains? Where? *Where?* Jacob, I don't understand. Explain. Speak comfort to me.

MARLEY. I have no comfort for you, Ebenezer Scrooge. That comes from other regions. Nor can I tell you everything I might. A very little more is all that's permitted to me. I can't stay, I can't rest, I can't linger anywhere be-

cause in life my spirit never roved beyond our counting-house. Mark me!—in life my spirit never strayed beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole. And so, many more weary journeys lie ahead for me.

SCROOGE. Seven years dead—have you been traveling all the time?

MARLEY. Aye. No rest. No peace. Incessant torture of remorse—

SCROOGE. Why remorse? You were always a splendid businessman, Jacob.

MARLEY. Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business. Charity, mercy, forbearance and benevolence were my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business. I failed to learn that lesson. And this time of year, I suffer most.

SCROOGE. Christmas time?

MARLEY. Yes. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow beings with my eyes turned away? ...I am here tonight to warn you that you still have a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope that I have arranged, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE. Oh, you were always a good friend, Jacob. Thank you, thank you.

MARLEY. Tonight, you will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE. Yes, thank you, I could always count on you for—(*Take.*) Haunted?!

MARLEY. Haunted.

SCROOGE. Is that the chance and hope you're offering me?

MARLEY. It is.

SCROOGE. I think I'd rather not.

SCROOGE. Much obliged—but I can't help thinking that a night of unbroken sleep would be more conducive to that end.

GHOST 1. Don't trifle with me, sir. This is a matter of salvation. Yours. *(Extends hand.)* Rise. Rise and walk with me. *(Starts downstage.)*

SCROOGE *(following)*. Where?

GHOST 1 *(pantomimes opening the drapes, flinging the windows open; points above)*. There.

SCROOGE. The sky? I am a mere mortal. I'll fall.

GHOST 1 *(extending hand)*. Touch your hand to mine. You shall be upheld.

SCROOGE. But—but—

(The GHOST won't be denied. Slowly, tentatively, SCROOGE moves his hand to rest on that of GHOST. The moment their hands touch—a flash of light. Black-out. Music. And the sound of a rushing wind. They are flying among the stars... The wind soon calms and fades. Cold bright light floods the stage. Limbo setting except for a small bench upstage, perhaps one or two stark leafless trees. It's winter.)

Start Here ———> SCROOGE. Good heavens. I know this countryside. I was bred and brought up here.

GHOST 1. Your lip is trembling. And what is that on your cheek?

SCROOGE *(rubbing it away)*. Nothing.

GHOST 1. Do you remember that path? *(Indicates bench.)*

SCROOGE. Remember it? I could walk it blindfolded.

GHOST 1. And that great mansion of dull red brick at the head of the path?

SCROOGE. My school, what else? The charity school. For children whose parents were too poor to care for them through the year.

GHOST 1. Strange to have forgotten these things for so many years...

(The STUDENTS begin to appear. Their clothes are poor, ill-fitting, patched. They carry shabby bundles of belongings, or cheap valises. Among them is YOUNG SCROOGE. During this:)

DICKENS. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes. The spacious offices were little used. Their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, their gates decayed. Visible through many open doors were small dreary rooms, poorly furnished.

(One of the YOUNGSTERS walks toward SCROOGE, who darts back.)

GHOST 1. They can't see you. They are but shadows of things that have been.

SCROOGE. Mighty thin shadows, I'd say.

DICKENS. There was a vast and chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candlelight, and not too much to eat. But on this particular day, the gloom of the setting could not suppress certain feelings of elation...

BOY *(hugging GIRL)*. A merry Christmas to you, Felicity.

GIRL. And you.

(Others echo the greeting. SCHOOLMASTER appears, with stick. Of all the play's characters, he is closest to a genuine Dickensian villain.)

SCHOOLMASTER. Stop that. Lower your voices, or I shall give you a taste of this. You are not on holiday yet. *(Frightened, the CHILDREN calm down. SCHOOLMASTER tweaks an ear.)* Young master Jobe. Pray tell me why you were hopping about in such a ridiculous and jocular fashion?

BOY 2. Sir, it's Christmas.

SCHOOLMASTER *(to another)*. And you, Miss Pearl? The same explanation?

GIRL 2. Indeed, sir.

SCHOOLMASTER. Do you seriously believe that pious invocations of the season will fill your scrawny bellies—or the purses of your parents, whose very incompetence put you here? Not in this life, my dears—this life or any other. Now clear the premises. *(They start out.)* Quietly—quietly! *(Forlorn, YOUNG SCROOGE watches the others depart, then sits with his book. SCHOOLMASTER consults his watch.)* My time is valuable, Master Scrooge. Is no one coming for you?

YOUNG SCROOGE. I don't know, sir.

SCHOOLMASTER. What about your father? Or is he still locked up in debtor's prison?

YOUNG SCROOGE. No, sir! He was let out.

SCHOOLMASTER. Then pray tell me when he will be here to collect you.

YOUNG SCROOGE. I don't know.

SCHOOLMASTER. Surely *someone* will be arriving—?

YOUNG SCROOGE. Sir, I presume so. It's Christmas.

End Here ———>

SCHOOLMASTER. That word again. Master Scrooge, you're a bright young chap. Brighter than most of that lot. Let me share a secret. "Christmas" is merely one of a number of convenient fictions devised to keep the poor classes in a useful state of humility—docility—and productivity. It is an utter humbug, my boy. *(Jabs him with stick.)* Keep that in mind and you'll prosper. *(Exits.)*

SCROOGE *(watches the sad, bewildered face of his younger self for a moment)*. I wish—oh, I wish... but it's too late.

GHOST 1. Too late for what?

SCROOGE *(with effort)*. Last night, there was a boy singing a Christmas carol at my door. I should have liked to have given him something, that's all.

GHOST 1. Indeed. A most interesting development.

(FAN, a girl about the age of YOUNG SCROOGE, enters. She's dressed for winter—bonnet, muff, etc.)

FAN. Ebenezer?

YOUNG SCROOGE. Fan!

FAN *(after they hug)*. I have come to bring you home, brother dear.

YOUNG SCROOGE. Home?

FAN. Yes. And not just for Christmas. For good and all. Father is a changed man. He has a new position—sweeping out a number of very fine commercial establishments. He is ever so much calmer, and kinder... he spoke so gently to me night before last, I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home. And he said yes! He sent me in a coach to bring you. It cost a lot, but he was emphatic: you are to come home and find

BELLE. There was no other way to tell you but forthrightly.

EBENEZER. I don't understand your decision to break our engagement.

BELLE. That is why I asked you to meet me here. *(Beat.)*
At half past six o'clock.

EBENEZER. I'm sorry to be so late. I had to stay and confer with the solicitors about the new leases and contracts. They will make me a huge sum.

BELLE. You see, you do understand my note after all.

EBENEZER. No, no. *(Taking her hands.)* Could anyone idolize you more than I?

BELLE *(a small shake of her head)*. Another idol has displaced me. And if it can't cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, that is the way of the world.

EBENEZER. What are you talking about? What idol has displaced you?

BELLE. A golden idol.

EBENEZER. Belle, be reasonable. I am only trying to deal with the world on its own terms. There is nothing the world professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth—and nothing on which it is so hard as poverty.

BELLE. You fear the world too much, Ebenezer. All your other hopes have disappeared, leaving one. The hope that the world will never scorn you for being poor.

EBENEZER. Belle—

BELLE. It's true. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until only one master passion engrosses you. Gain.

EBENEZER. What of it? Even if I have grown wiser, I am not changed toward you. Belle—am I? ←—— Start Here

BELLE *(turns away a moment; gently)*. When our parents made the marriage contract long ago, you and I were poor, but content to be. We knew hard work would improve our situation modestly as years passed. That was enough. In those days, Ebenezer, you were another man.

EBENEZER. I was a boy. Witless and naive.

BELLE. You see? Your own feeling tells you that you are not what you were. Alas, I am. How often and how painfully I've thought of that, I won't say. It is enough that I have thought of it—and can release you.

EBENEZER. Have I ever sought release?

BELLE. In words? No. Never.

EBENEZER. In what, then?

BELLE. In a changed nature. An altered spirit. In everything that made my love of any worth and value in your sight. If there were no contract, tell me—would you seek me out and try to win me now?

EBENEZER *(colder)*. You think not. *(Snow begins to fall.)*

BELLE. I would gladly think otherwise—if I could. *(Goes to him.)* It's a hard truth, but it is the truth. If you were free today, can I ever believe you'd choose a girl without a dowry—you who by your own admittance weigh everything by gain or loss? Or suppose you did choose such a girl. I know that repentance and regret would surely follow. I have nothing to give you, Ebenezer. Nothing of what you value. I release you. I do so with a heart full of love for the man you once were. *(She kisses his cheek tenderly.)* You may feel a little pain. But only for a brief time. And then you'll dismiss the memory gladly—an unprofitable dream—and you'll be happy

that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen.

EBENEZER. Don't do this, Belle.

BELLE. There's no other way. Good-bye, Ebenezer. *(She exits. He stands forlorn in the falling snow as the scene fades.)*

SCROOGE. Spirit, this is too much. Conduct me home.

GHOST 1. There is one more shadow of the past to be seen.

SCROOGE. No! I don't wish to see it.

GHOST 1. One more.

(As lights fade up in another area:)

SCROOGE. Why do you delight to torture me?

(BELLE enters, chatting with a cheerful LITTLE GIRL. BELLE's dress is plain; there is some gray in her hair now. BELLE's HUSBAND enters, carrying packages.)

BELLE'S DAUGHTER. Papa's home! *(She flies to him. They embrace. BELLE kisses her HUSBAND warmly.)*

BELLE'S HUSBAND *(taking off coat, gloves)*. I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon, my dear.

BELLE. Who was it?

BELLE'S HUSBAND. Guess.

BELLE. Tut! I can't.

BELLE'S HUSBAND. Mr. Scrooge.

BELLE. Ebenezer?

BELLE'S HUSBAND. Aye. I passed his office window, and the shutters were open. He had only a candle inside. No other light. His partner Marley lies upon the point of

End Here ———>

death, they say—and there sat your old friend. Alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe. *(The memory pains her. She leans against him for comfort.)*

BELLE. How sad. *(A beat.)* But that is the life he chose. *(Light fades on BELLE and her family.)*

SCROOGE *(breaking down)*. No more. No more! *(Light fades on SCROOGE and the GHOST. Music.)*

SCENE SEVEN

(SCROOGE's room. He paces, distraught. The bell tolls two. Offstage, there is a loud hollow knocking. SCROOGE crouches behind the chair, shaking. Knocking is repeated.)

GHOST 2 *(off)*. Ebenezer Scrooge. I command you to open the door.

(All fear and trembling, SCROOGE goes off. Sound of door opening. Stage is flooded with greenish light—perhaps a pattern of holly leaves. SCROOGE comes cowering on stage, walking backwards in awe of someone whose heavy footsteps reverberate. A moment later GHOST 2 appears. He wears a dark green robe edged with white fur. The toes of his green slippers are curled. A pouch of magic dust hangs on his belt. A holly crown sits on his head. He is robust and jolly. SCROOGE doesn't look at him directly.)

FRED.

GOD BLESS THE DAY,
BRIMMING WITH LOVE.
GOD BLESS THE CHILD
COME FROM ABOVE.

GOD BLESS THE TREE,
SWEET FRAGRANT PINE.
GOD BLESS THE FOWL
ROASTED SO FINE.

GOD GRANT EV'RY YULETIDE WISH,
AND ONE MORE ERE WE'RE DONE—
ALL THROUGH THE YEAR TO COME,
GOD BLESS US, EV'RY ONE.
THROUGH ALL THE YEAR TO COME—
GOD BLESS US, EV'RY ONE.

(FRED and GUESTS repeat the song together. Big finish. GUESTS applaud.)

TOPPER. Fred, let's have a game.

FRED. Capital idea, Topper. What shall it be?

TOPPER. Our favorite. "Yes and No." *(Enthusiastic agreement from GUESTS.)*

FRED. Have we time before the meal, Sara?

SARA. Oh, ample time, husband.

TOPPER. Then permit me to be "it"—for I have a very suitable subject in mind.

(GUESTS arrange themselves around him. SCROOGE inches toward the fringe, interested in spite of himself.)

Throughout the following, TOPPER can barely contain his amusement.)

TOPPER. I am thinking of something which is neither vegetable or mineral, but animal. ←—— Start Here

RAUCOUS LADY. It's the big fat goose Sara's cooking—I know it.

TOPPER. No, I'm afraid it is not. The animal in question has absolutely nothing to do with this blessed holiday.

FRED. Here, Topper—no clues. Yes and no—that's all.

TOPPER. Sorry.

(The following should go quickly—a "brisk fire" as Dickens puts it. The game steadily gathers momentum, with all the GUESTS—and SCROOGE—engrossed and excited. Questions should be assigned according to number of actors in the scene.)

GUEST. Is it a live animal?

TOPPER. Yes.

GUEST. Is it in this room?

TOPPER. Oh, no.

GUEST. Is it savage?

TOPPER. Yes!

GUEST. Is it in a menagerie?

TOPPER. No.

SCROOGE. I say—it's rather intriguing. *(Moves a little closer.)*

GUEST. Is this animal ever killed in a market?

TOPPER. No.

GUEST. But it is a disagreeable animal?

TOPPER *(stifling mirth)*. Oh, yes.

GUEST. Does it grunt and growl sometimes?
 TOPPER. Yes!
 GUEST. Does it live in London?
 TOPPER. Yes.
 SCROOGE (*shooting up his hand*). I know, I know!
 GUEST. Does it walk about the streets?
 TOPPER. Yes.
 SCROOGE. Is it a performing bear? (*No one hears him. Instead:*)
 GUEST (*excited*). It's a bear!
 TOPPER (*thinks it over for a beat*). No.
 GUEST. Is this animal led around by someone?
 TOPPER. No, it is not.
 GUEST (*to another*). Then it definitely can't be a bear.

(*SCROOGE is busy whispering questions to the GHOST. FRED has guessed the answer, and looks less cheerful.*)

GUEST. Topper, is it a horse?
 TOPPER. No.
 GUEST. A dog?
 TOPPER. No.
 GUEST. A pig?
 TOPPER. No.
 GUEST. A cat?
 TOPPER. No.
 GUEST. But it walks around London...
 ANOTHER GUEST. And it's very disagreeable...
 RAUCOUS LADY. Does it talk?
 TOPPER (*knows she's got it*). Yes.
 RAUCOUS LADY. I have found it out, Topper! I know what it is!

End Here ——>

SCROOGE (*practically beside himself*). What? What? (*All the GUESTS stare at RAUCOUS LADY, waiting.*)
 RAUCOUS LADY (*to FRED*). It's your uncle S-c-r-o-o-g-e!
 TOPPER. Yes! (*Reactions from GUESTS. SCROOGE looks as if someone bludgeoned him.*)
 FEMALE GUEST. But Topper, you misled us. I distinctly recall asking you, "Is it a bear?"—to which you answered "no"—which was sufficient to divert all thoughts from Mr. Scrooge! (*Agreement. SCROOGE looks sick.*)
 TOPPER. Well, I did have some doubt about that answer... sorry, my dear.
 GUEST (*to FRED*). But he said the animal had nothing to do with Christmas, and that's true enough, isn't it? Your uncle never joins these festivities, does he?
 FRED. Alas, no. He says Christmas is a humbug. He believes it, too.
 SARA. He's a pitiful creature.
 FRED. I suppose that's true, missis. But in some ways he's a comical old fellow...though Topper is right, he does growl and snap too much. (*Arm around SARA.*) Never mind. His offenses carry their own punishment.
 GUEST. Very rich, isn't he, your uncle?
 FRED. Yes, but what of it? His wealth is of no earthly use. He doesn't do any good with it—he doesn't make himself comfortable with it...ah, but I can't be angry with him. I'm sorry for him. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself—always. He takes it into his head to dislike us, and won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He loses dinner.
 SARA. A very good dinner.
 FRED. I was about to say that, my love.

MRS. CRATCHIT. What a weight off my mind! I've been so busy, I forgot to ask you, Bob. How was the service?

BOB. Oh, it was lovely. A splendid sermon, and the choir never sounded more glorious.

(MARTHA, BELINDA, and PETER enter.)

MRS. CRATCHIT. And how did Tiny Tim behave in church?

BOB. As good as gold. No, better. *(Indicates empty stool.)* He sits by himself so much, sometimes his thoughts are deep and very grown-up. Coming home from church, he told me that he hoped all the people saw him there.

MARTHA. Why, Papa?

BOB. He said it was because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant for them to remember on Christmas Day—who it was who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.

(The thought is too much for MRS. CRATCHIT. She averts her head. The tapping of TINY TIM's small crutch breaks the silence. He hobbles on.)

Start Here ---> BOB. Tim. My boy. Here's your place. *(BOB picks him up, puts him on his shoulder and carries him to the stool, where he sets him gently. Then he uncorks the jug and sniffs.)* Ah, the gin and lemons are steeped just right. *(CHILDREN exclaim.)* Only a thimbleful for each of you! *(The family members settle themselves while he pours a glass for his wife, and a drop for each of the three older children.)* This for you, my boy. *(Gives TIM an orange.)* Now gather round, my dears. *(As they do, he*

raises his glass.) Before we seat ourselves to dine, I'll give you Mr. Scrooge—the founder of our feast.

MRS. CRATCHIT *(before anyone can drink)*. Oit; no. "The founder of our feast," is it? I wish I had him here, I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon!

BOB. My dear... ahem. The children. Christmas Day...

MRS. CRATCHIT. Yes indeed, Christmas Day... only on Christmas Day could one even think of toasting the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert. Nobody knows it better than you—scrimping along on fifteen "Bob" a week—just a pitiful fifteen copies of your Christian name every Saturday!

BOB. Nevertheless, my dear... *(A waggle of his glass.)* Christmas Day.

MRS. CRATCHIT *(after a beat)*. All right. I'll drink his health for your sake, but not his. Long life to him. A merry Christmas and a happy New Year. *(She drinks, and so does BOB. But with no verve. The children abstain, frowning, staring at the floor, etc.)*

BOB. Children, what's wrong?

MRS. CRATCHIT. Need you ask? You mentioned the name of the ogre. The one whose very existence casts a pall on this house.

BOB. Really. I don't feel so badly about Mr. Scrooge, but I shall respect your opinions. Come, let's raise a toast more pleasing to the whole company. Children!... *(After a moment's thought, he lifts his glass.)* A very merry Christmas to us all! God bless us. *(In turn, MRS. CRATCHIT and the three older children say, "God bless us"—and with enthusiasm. TIM is last.)*

TINY TIM. God bless us, every one!

(The others sample their drinks. BOB is so moved, he can't. He puts his glass on mantel—turns away a moment so he can quickly dash a tear from his eye. He pulls up another stool and sits beside TINY TIM, holding his hand and speaking earnestly—silently—as light fades up a little more on SCROOGE and GHOST 2.)

SCROOGE. They have nothing. And they are happy. How can it be?

GHOST 2. On this day, all things can be. *(Sprinkles some of his dust. Glitter music. CRATCHIT scene freezes.)*

SCROOGE. What of the little boy, Tiny Tim?

GHOST 2. Crippled in a most cruel way—as you see.

SCROOGE. What will befall him? Will he live?

GHOST 2. I see a vacant stool there in the chimney corner. I see a crutch without an owner—carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unchanged by the future, the child will die.

SCROOGE. No. No! You're a kindly spirit. Say he will be spared.

GHOST 2. If these shadows remain unaltered, none other of my race will find him here. *(Beat.)* If he's to die, let him. It will decrease the surplus population.

SCROOGE. The surplus—? *(The words hit home.)* Oh.

GHOST 2. We must go. *(CRATCHIT scene begins to dim out.)*

SCROOGE. Why such a hurry?

GHOST 2. My life upon this globe is very brief. It ends tonight.

SCROOGE. Tonight?

GHOST 2. Upon the final stroke of midnight. That time is almost upon us. *(Music begins—a distant chorus singing*

a carol heard earlier. But this is soon distorted and covered by a sinister orchestral strain. Music continues to build to end of scene.) When I am gone, you must meet the third and final spirit. This one you will find less pleasant and kindly than its predecessors.

SCROOGE. I don't want to meet a spirit like that.

GHOST 2. There is no choice. *(Agitated, SCROOGE paces. A scrawny hand gropes out from under the hem of the GHOST's robe. Then another. SCROOGE spies them, starts.)*

SCROOGE. Spirit—forgive me this question—but do I not spy something strange, not belonging to yourself—just there? *(Another hand appears, clutching air.)* Is it a foot—or a claw?

GHOST 2. It might be a claw, for all the flesh there is upon it. Look closer.

(From within his great robe he materializes IGNORANCE and WANT, two barefoot children with filthy faces and clothes made of rags. SCROOGE cries out, retreats.)

GHOST 2. Don't turn away. I command you to look! *(SCROOGE obeys. The CHILDREN—'yellow, meager, scowling, wolfish'—advance on him with outstretched hands. SCROOGE tries to bring himself to pat one, as:)*

SCROOGE. On closer inspection, I see they are charming, fine young—No! That is a lie. They are not fine. Their eyes are empty of laughter, or hope. They are poor, pale creatures. Stunted—starving. Spirit—are these children yours?

End here --->

SCENE SIX

(Lights snap up on SCROOGE's bedchamber. SCROOGE kneels on the bed, clutching the post, bug-eyed with terror.)

Start Here ---->

SCROOGE *(babbling)*. I will keep Christmas. The three spirits will live and strive within me. I will sponge out the writing on that stone—*(A beat. He blinks.)* The stone. Where's the stone? *(Feels the bedpost.)* This is my bedpost. *(Feels covers.)* My bed. *(Looks around.)* My room. *(Jumps out of bed, feeling his arms and legs wildly.)* I'm alive—I'm alive! *(Then—another momentous discovery.)* There are no chains! It's all right, it's all true—it all happened—and the shadows of things that would have been, can be dispelled. They will be! Oh, Jacob Marley—Heaven and Christmas time be praised! I say it on my knees, old Jacob—*(He kneels, hands clasped high.)* On my knees! *(There is a moment of genuine joy. Tears fill his eyes. Then he jumps up again.)* I don't know what to do!

End Here ---->

(He dances around the stage. DICKENS enters and stands watching.)

SCROOGE *(dancing)*. I am as light as a feather. I am as happy as an angel. I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man—*(Stops.)* I feel like laughing aloud! *(A beat. Then—very faint, tentative.)* Hah. *(A little louder.)* Hah-hah! *(Still louder.)* Hah-hah-hah!

DICKENS *(to audience)*. Really—for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid

laugh. A most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs.

SCROOGE. But I don't know what day it is. I don't know how long I've been among the spirits. I don't know anything—I'm like a baby. Never mind, I don't care, I'd rather be a baby. *(Runs downstage, unlatches the imaginary windows and flings them open. Brilliant sunshine floods the stage. A pealing of many bells begins faintly and comes up underneath. Bells should fade out a few speeches later. SCROOGE leans out.)* Whoop! Hello! Hello, down there! *(Gazing out.)* No fog! No mist! Clear bracing air! Golden sunlight! Heavenly sky! Merry bells! Oh, glorious—glorious!

(STREET BOY has entered downstage of the bedroom. SCROOGE plays scene downstage of him, looking out the window and "down"—that is, into audience.)

SCROOGE. You there! Boy! What is today?

STREET BOY. What's that, guv'nor?

SCROOGE. What's today, my fine fellow?

STREET BOY. Today? Why, Christmas Day.

SCROOGE *(to himself)*. Christmas Day! I haven't missed it! The spirits did it all in one night. Of course, why not? They can do anything—*(Sees STREET BOY starting out.)* Just a moment, my lad.

STREET BOY. Hallo? Yes?

SCROOGE. Do you know the poultry shop in the next street but one, on the corner?

STREET BOY. I should hope I do, guv'nor. I live 'round here.