

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

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A Christmas Carol

Story by
Charles Dickens

Adapted for the Stage by
Frederick Gaines

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“You are the Judge. Do not judge, then. It may be that in the sight of heaven you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man’s child. Oh god! To hear an insect on a leaf pronouncing that there is too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust.”

This adaptation of Charles Dickens’s A Christmas Carol was first produced by the Children’s Theatre Company of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts in November 1968. The script was edited by Linda Walsh Jenkins with the assistance of Carol K Metz.

Cast of Characters:

Carolers, families, dancers	Ben Benjamin
First Boy	Child Scrooge
Second Boy	Fan, Scrooge’s sister
Third Boy	Fezziwig
Little girl with a doll	Dick Wilkins
Ebenezer Scrooge	Young Ebenezer
Fred, Scrooge’s Nephew	Sweetheart of Young Ebenezer
Bob Cratchit, Scrooge’s clerk	Second Spirit (the Spirit of Christmas Present)
Gentleman visitor	Mrs. Cratchit
Warder and residents of the poorhouse	Several Cratchit children
Sparsit, Scrooge’s servant	Tiny Tim
Cook	Hunger and Ignorance, the beggar children
Charwoman	Pawnbroker
Jacob Marley	Third Spirit (the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come)
Leper	Butcher
First Spirit (the Spirit of Christmas Past)	Coachman
Jack Walton	

Sequence of Scenes:

Overture	“Christ the King, My Gentle One”
Scene i	Scrooge in His Shop
Scene ii	Scrooge Goes Home
Scene iii	The Spirit of Christmas Past
Scene iv	The Spirit of Christmas Present
Scene v	The Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come
Scene vi	Scrooge’s Conversion

Notes on the Play:

Ebenezer Scrooge, obsessed with solitude and greed, collides in a nightmare with his own youth and his lost love. In Frederick Gaines’s theatrical adaptation of Charles Dickens’s story, Scrooge is visited by the spirits of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Yet to Come in

scenes that flow rapidly from one to the next, activated by the setting. Carolers sing fragments of joyous Christmas songs in the corners of Scrooge's mind, and a little girl with a doll accompanies him on the street and joins him on his dream-journey. The visiting spirits of Christmas force Scrooge to confront people and scenes from his life that remind him of his friendlessness – he even sees his home and his future corpse being rifled by his own servants. Finally, he awakens to the reality of Christmas morning and discovers the joy of giving, loving, and caring for others.

The play is designed to be produced on a simply mounted, nonrealistic setting. A high platform that serves as Scrooge's bed is at a downstage right. The space under it forms the entrance to Scrooge's office. A series of stairs and ramps makes a curving sweep from the bed across the upstage area and slopes down to a chair-high platform at left center. The set is painted black and is hung with dark textured fabrics at the back and sides. The props include candles, lanterns, the little girl's doll, and platters of food and bowls of drink for Fezziwig's party. The set furnishings include Scrooge's writing desk, the Cratchits' armchair, and chandeliers for the parties. The costumes, based on fashions of the nineteenth-century London, provide color and texture against the abstract setting.

Overture "Christ the Kind, My Gentle One"

The play begins amid a swirl of street life in Victorian London. Happy groups pass; brightly costumed carolers and families call out to one another and sing "Joy to the World." Three boys and a girl are grouped about a glowing mound of coal. As the carolers leave the stage, the lights dim and the focus shifts to the mound of coals, bright against the dark. Slowly, the children begin to respond to the warmth. A piano plays softly as the children talk.

FIRST BOY:

I saw a horse in a window. (*pause*) A dapple...grey and white. And a saddle, too...red. And a strawberry mane down to here. All new. Golden stirrups. (*people pass by the children, muttering greetings to one another.*)

SECOND BOY:

Christmas Eve.

THIRD BOY:

Wish we could go.

FIRST BOY:

So do I.

THIRD BOY:

I think I'd like it.

FIRST BOY:

Oh, wouldn't I...wouldn't I!

SECOND BOY:

We'er going up onto the roof. (The boys look at him quizzically.) My father's a glass. Telescope. A brass one. It opens up and it has twists on it and an eyepiece that you put up to look through. We can see all the way to the park with it.

THIRD BOY:

Could I look through it?

SECOND BOY:

Maybe...where would you look? (*Third boy points straight up.*) Why there?

THIRD BOY:

I'd like to see the moon. (*The boys stand and look upward as the girl sings to her doll. On of the boys makes a snow angel on the ground.*)

GIRL:

(*Singing*)

Christ the King came down one day,
Into this world of ours,
And crying from a manger bed,
Began the Christmas hour.

(*Speaking*)

Christ the King, my pretty one,
Sleep softly on my breast,
Christ the King my gentle one,
Show us the way to rest.

(*She begins to sing the first verse again. As snow starts to fall on the boy making a snow angel, he stands up and reaches out to catch a single flake.*)

Scene i. Scrooge in His Shop

The percussion thunders. Scroogehurls himself through the descending snowflakes and sends the children scattering. They retreat, watching. Cratchit comes in. He takes some coal from the mound and puts it into a small bucket; as he carries it to a corner of the stage, the stage area is transformed from street to office. Scrooge's nephew Fred enters, talks with the children, gives them coins, and sends them away with a "Merry Christmas."

FRED:

A Merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE:

Bah! Humbug!

FRED:

Christmas is a humbug, Uncle? I hope that's meant as a joke.

SCROOGE:

Well, it's not. Come, some, what is it you want? Don't waste all day, Nephew.

FRED:

I only want to wish you a Merry Christmas, Uncle. Don't be cross.

SCROOGE:

What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out with Merry Christmas! What's Christmas to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older but not an hour richer. If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.

FRED:

Uncle!

SCROOGE:

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

FRED:

But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE:

Then leave it alone then, much good it may do you. Much good it has ever done you.

FRED:

There are many things from which I might have derived good by which I have not profited, I daresay, Christmas among the rest. And though it has never put a scrap of gold in my pocket, I believe it has done me good and will do me good, and I say God bless it!

SCROOGE:

Bah!

FRED:

Don't be angry, Uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE:

I'll dine alone, thank you.

FRED:

But why?

SCROOGE:

Why? Why did you get married?

FRED:

Why, because I fell in love with a wonderful girl.

SCROOGE:

And I with solitude. Good afternoon.

FRED:

Nay, Uncle, but you never came to see me before I was married. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?

SCROOGE:

Good afternoon.

FRED:

I am sorry with all my heart to find you so determined; but I have made the attempt to homage Christmas, and I'll keep that good spirit to the last. So, a Merry Christmas, Uncle.

SCROOGE:

Good Afternoon!

FRED:

And a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE:

Good Afternoon! (*Fred hesitates as if to say something more, he sees that Scrooge has gone to get a volume down from the shelf, and he starts to leave. As he leaves, the doorbell rings.*) Bells. Is it necessary to always have bells? (*The Gentleman visitor enters, causing the doorbell to ring again.*) Cratchit!

CRATCHIT:

Yes, sir?

SCROOGE:

The bell, fool! See to it!

CRATCHIT:

Yes, sir. (*He goes to the entrance.*)

SCROOGE:

(*muttering*) Merry Christmas...Wolves howling and a Merry Christmas...

CRATCHIT:

It's for you, sir.

SCROOGE:
Of course it's for me. You're not receiving callers, are you? Show them in.

CRATCHIT:
Right this way, sir. (*The gentleman visitor approaches Scrooge.*)

SCROOGE:
Yes, yes?

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:
Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE:
Marley's dead. Seven years tonight. What is it you want?

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:
I have no doubt that his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner. Here, sir, my card. (*He hand Scrooge his business card.*)

SCROOGE:
Liberality? No doubt of it? All right, all right, I can read. What is it you want? (*he returns to his work.*)

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:
At this festive season of the year...

SCROOGE:
It's winter and cold. (*He continues his work and ignores the gentleman visitor.*)

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:
Yes...yes, it is, and the more reason for my visit. At this time of the year it is more than usually desirable to make some slight provision for the poor and destitute who suffer greatly from the cold. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE:
Are there no prisons?

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:
Many, sir.

SCROOGE:
And the workhouse, is it still in operation?

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:

It is, still, I wish I could say it was not.

SCROOGE:

The poor law is still in full vigor then?

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:

Yes, sir.

SCROOGE:

I'm glad to hear it. From what you said, I was afraid someone had stopped its operation.

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:

Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are endeavoring to raise funds to buy the poor some meat and drink and means of warmth. We chose this time because it is the time, of all others, when want is keenly felt and abundance rejoices. May I put you down for something, sir?

SCROOGE:

(Retreating to the darkness temporarily) Nothing.

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:

You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE:

I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, sir, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry, I help support the establishments I have mentioned...they cost enough...and those who are poorly off must go there.

GENTLEMAN VISITOR:

Many can't go there, and many would rather die.

SCROOGE:

If they would rather die, they had better do it and decrease the surplus population. That is not my affair. My business is. It occupies me constantly. *(He talks both to the gentleman visitor and himself while he thumbs through his books.)* Ask a man to give up life and means...fine thing. What is it, I want to know? Charity? Damned charity! *(His nose deep in his books, he vaguely hears the dinner bell being rung in the workhouse; he looks up as if he has heard it but never focuses on the actual scene. The warder of the poorhouse stands in a pool of light at the far left, slowly ringing a bell.)*

WARDER:

Dinner. All right. Line up. *(The poorly clad, dirty residents of the poorhouse line up and file by to get their evening dish of gruel, wordlessly accepting it and going back to eat)*

listlessly in the gloom. Scrooge returns to the business of his office. The procession continues for a moment, then the image of the poorhouse is obscured by darkness. The dejected gentleman visitor exits.)

SCROOGE:

Latch the door, Cratchit. Firmly, firmly. Draft as cold as Christmas blowing in here. Charity! *(Cratchit goes to the door, starts to close it, then sees the little girl with the doll. She seems to beckon to him; he moves slowly toward her, and they dance together for a moment. Scrooge continues to work. Suddenly carolers appear on the platform, and a few phrases of their carol, "Angels We Have Heard On High," are heard. Scrooge looks up.)* Cratchit! *(As soon as Scrooge shouts, the girl and carolers vanish and Cratchit begins to close up the shop.)* Cratchit!

CRATCHIT:

Yes, sir?

SCROOGE:

Well, to work then!

CRATCHIT:

It's evening, sir.

SCROOGE:

Is it?

CRATCHIT:

Christmas evening, sir.

SCROOGE:

Oh, you'll want all day tomorrow off, I suppose.

CRATCHIT:

If it's quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE:

It's not convenient, and it's not fair. If I was to deduct half a crown from your salary for it, you'd think yourself ill used, wouldn't you? Still you expect me to pay a day's wage for a day of no work.

CRATCHIT:

It's only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE:

Be here all the earlier the next morning.

CRATCHIT:

I will, sir.

SCROOGE:

Then off, off.

CRATCHIT:

Yes, sir! Merry Christmas, Sir!

SCROOGE:

Bah! *(As soon as Cratchit opens the door, the sounds of the street begin, very bright and loud. Cratchit is caught up in a swell of people hurrying down the street. Children pull him along to the top of an ice slide, and he runs and slides down it, disappearing in darkness as the stage suddenly is left almost empty. Scrooge goes around the room blowing out candles, talking to himself.)* Christmas Eve. Carolers! Bah! There. Another day. *(He opens his door and peers out.)* Black, very black. Now where are they? *(The children are heard singing carols for a moment)* Begging pennies for their songs, are they? Oh boy! Here, boy! *(The little girl emerges from the shadows. Scrooge hands her a dark lantern and she holds it while he lights it with an ember from the pile of coals.)*

Scene ii. Scrooge Goes Home

SCROOGE:

(Talking to the little girl) Hold it quiet! There. Off now. That's it. High. Black as pitch. Light the street, that's it. You're a bright lad! Good to see that. Earn your supper, boy. You'll not go hungry this night. Home. You know the way, do you? Yes, that's the way. The house of Ebenezer Scrooge. *(As the two find their way to Scrooge's house, the audience sees and hears a brief image of a cathedral interior with a living crèche and a large choir singing "Amen!"; the image ends in a blackout. The lights come up immediately, and Scrooge is at his door.)* Hold the light up, boy, up *(The girl with the lantern disappears.)* where did he go? Boy? No matter. There's a penny saved. Lantern's gone out. No matter. A candle saved. Yes, here's the key. *(He turns the key toward the door, and Marley's face swims out of the darkness. Scrooge watches, unable to speak. He fumbles for a match, lights the lantern, and swings it toward the figure, which melts away. Pause. Scrooge fits the key in the lock and turns it as the door suddenly is opened from the inside by the porter, Sparsit. Scrooge is startled, then recovers.)* Sparsit?

SPARSIT:

Yes, sir?

SCROOGE:

Hurry, hurry. The door...close it.

SPARSIT:

Did you knock, sir?

SCROOGE:

Knock? What matter? Here, light me up the stairs.

SPARSIT:

Yes, sir *(He leads Scrooge up the stairs. They pass the cook on the way. Scrooge brushes by here, stops, looks back, and leans toward him.)*

COOK:

Something to warm you, sir? Porridge?

SCROOGE:

Wha...? No. No, nothing.

COOK:

(Waiting for her Christmas coin) Merry Christmas, sir. *(Scrooge ignores the request and the cook disappears. Mumbling, Scrooge follows Sparsit.)*

SCROOGE:

(Looking back after the cook is gone) Fright a man nearly out of his life...Merry Christmas...bah!

SPARSIT:

Your room, sir.

SCROOGE:

Hmm? Oh yes, yes. And good night.

SPARSIT:

(Extending his hand for his coin) Merry Christmas, sir.

SCROOGE:

Yes, yes...*(He sees the outstretched hand; he knows what Sparsit wants and is infuriated.)* out! Out! *(He closes the door after Sparsit, turns toward his chamber, and discovers the charwoman directly behind him)*

CHARWOMAN:

Warm your bed for you, sir?

SCROOGE:

What? Out! Out!

CHARWOMAN:

Aye, sir. *(She starts for the door. Marley's voice is heard mumbling something unintelligible.)*

SCROOGE:

What's that?

CHARWOMAN:

Me, sir? Not a thing, sir.

SCROOGE:

Then, good night.

CHARWOMAN:

Good night. *(She exits and Scrooge pantomimes shutting the door behind her. The voice of Marley over an offstage microphone whispers and reverberates: "Merry Christmas, Scrooge!" silence. Scrooge hears the voice but cannot account for it. He climbs up to open a window and looks down. A cathedral choir singing "O Come, All Ye Faithful" is heard in the distance. Scrooge listens a moment, shuts the window, and prepares for bed. As soon as he has shut the sound out of his room, figures appear; they seem to be coming down the main aisle of a church, bearing gifts to the living crèche. The orchestra plays "O Come, All Ye Faithful" as the procession files out. Scrooge, ready for bed, warms himself before the heap of coals. As he pulls his nightcap from a chair, a small handbell tumbles off onto the floor. Startled, he picks it up and rings it for reassurance; an echo answers it. He turns and sees the little girl on the street; she is swinging her doll, which produces the echo of his bell. Scrooge escapes to his bed; the girl is swallowed up in the darkness, the bell sounds grow to a din, incoherent as in a dream, then suddenly fall silent. Scrooge sits up in bed, listens, hears the chains of Marley coming up the stairs. Scrooge reaches for the bellpull to summon Sparsit. The bell responds with a gong, and Marley appears. He and Scrooge face one another.)*

SCROOGE:

What do you want with me?

MARLEY:

(In a ghostly, unreal voice.) Much.

SCROOGE:

Who are you?

MARLEY:

Ask who I was.

SCROOGE:

Who were you?

MARLEY:

In life, I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE:

He's Dead.

MARLEY:

Seven years this night, Ebenezer Scrooge.

SCROOGE:

Why do you come here?

MARLEY:

I must. It is commanded me. I must wander the world and see what I can no longer share, what I would not share when I walked where you do.

SCROOGE:

And must go thus?

MARLEY:

The chair? Look at it, Ebenezer, study it. Locks and vaults and golden coins. I forged it, each link, each day when I sat in these chairs, commanded these rooms. Greed, Ebenezer Scrooge, wealth. Feel them, know them. Yours was as heavy as this I wear seven years ago and you have labored to build it since.

SCROOGE:

If you're here to lecture, I have no time for it. It is late, the night is cold. I want comfort now.

MARLEY:

I have none to give. I know not how you see me this night. I did not ask it. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day. I am commanded to bring you a chance, Ebenezer. Heed it!

SCROOGE:

Quickly then, quickly.

MARLEY:

You will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE:

(Scoffing) Is that the chance?

MARLEY:

Mark it.

SCROOGE:

I do not choose to.

MARLEY:

(Ominously) Then you will walk where I do, burdened by your riches, your greed.

SCROOGE:

Spirits mean nothing to me.

MARLEY:

(Slowly leaving) Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one, the second the next night at the same hour, the third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ended. Look to see me no more. I must wander. Look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us.

SCROOGE:

Jacob...Don't leave me! ...Jacob! Jacob!

MARLEY:

Adieu, Ebenezer. (At Marley's last words a funeral procession begins to move across the stage. A boy walks in front; a priest follows, swinging a censer; sounds of mourning and the suggestion of church music are heard. Scrooge calls out, "Jacob, don't leave me!" as if talking in the midst of a bad dream. At the end of the procession is the little girl, swinging her doll and singing softly.)

GIRL:

*Hushabye, don't you cry,
Go to sleep, little baby,
When you wake, you shall have
All the pretty little horses,
Blacks and bays, dapples and grays,
All the pretty little horses.*

(She stops singing and looks up at Scrooge; their eyes meet and she solemnly rings the doll in greeting. Scrooge pulls shut the bed curtains and the little girl exits. The bell sounds are picked up by the bells of a leper who enters, dragging himself along.)

LEPER:

(Calling out) Leper! Leper! Stay the way! Leper! Leper! Keep away! *(He exits and the clock begins to chime, ringing the hours. Scrooge sits up in bed and begins to count the chimes.)*

SCROOGE:

Eight...nine...ten...eleven...it can't be...twelve. Midnight? No, not twelve. It can't be. I haven't slept the whole day through. Twelve? Yes, yes, twelve noon. *(He hurries to the window and looks out.)* Black. Twelve midnight. *(Pause)* I must get up. A day wasted. I must get down to the office. *(Two small chimes are heard.)* Quarter past. But it just rang twelve. Fifteen minutes haven't gone past, not so quickly. *(Again two small chimes are heard)* a quarter to one. The spirit... It's to come at one. *(He hurries to his bed as the chimes ring again)* One.

Scene iii. The Spirit of Christmas Past

The hour is struck again by a large street clock and the first spirit appears. It is a figure dressed to look like the little girl's doll.

SCROOGE:

Are you the spirit whose coming was foretold to me?

FIRST SPIRIT:

I am.

SCROOGE:

Who and what are you?

FIRST SPIRIT:

I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE:

Long past?

FIRST SPIRIT:

Your past.

SCROOGE:

Why are you here?

FIRST SPIRIT:

Your welfare. Rise. Walk with me.

SCROOGE:

I am mortal still. I cannot pass through air.

FIRST SPIRIT:

My hand. (*Scrooge grasps the spirit's hand tightly, and the doll's bell rings softly. Scrooge remembers a scene from his past in which two boys greet each other in the street.*)

FIRST VOICE:

Halloo, Jack!

SECOND VOICE:

Ben! Merry Christmas, Ben!

SCROOGE:

Jack Walton. Young Jack Walton. Spirits...?

FIRST VOICE:

Have a good holiday, Jack.

SCROOGE:

Yes, yes, I remember him. Both of them. Little Ben Benjamin. He used to...

FIRST VOICE:

See you next term, Jack. Next...term...

SCROOGE:

They...they're off for the holidays and going home from school. It's Christmas time...all of the children off home now...No...no, not at all... there was one... (*The spirit motions for Scrooge to turn, and he sees a young boy playing with a teddy bear and talking to it.*) Yes...reading...poor boy.

FIRST SPIRIT:

What, I wonder?

SCROOGE:

Reading? Oh, it was nothing. Fancy, all fancy and make-believe and take-me-away. All of it. Yes, nonsense.

CHILD SCROOGE:

Ali Baba.

SCROOGE:

Yes...that was it.

CHILD SCROOGE:

Genii, take me to the Gate of Damascus.

SCROOGE:

Yes, O Master, and jewels I shall bring you, and gold and myrrh and frankincense.

CHILD SCROOGE:

And they put him down – do you remember – that silly one, at the Gate of Damascus, in his underdrawers – asleep!

SCROOGE:

Yes, yes, the genii turned the Sultan's groom upside down and stood him on his head – served him right, I say!

CHILD SCROOGE:

And all the thieves and the jars of oil... (*Scrooge pretends to stab the jars of oil with his scimitar.*)

SCROOGE:

Yes, yes, and running them through – this and this and this for each of you!

CHILD SCROOGE:

Yes, and remember...and remember...remember Robinson Crusoe?

SCROOGE:

And the parrot!

CHILD SCROOGE:

Yes, the parrot! I love him best.

SCROOGE:

(Imitating the parrot) With his stripey green body and yellow tail drooping along and couldn't sing – awk – but could talk, and a thing like lettuce growing out the top of its head... and he used to sit on the very top of the tree – up there.

CHILD SCROOGE:

And Robinson Crusoe sailed around the island and he thought he parrot said, the parrot said...

SCROOGE:

(Imitating the parrot) Robinson Crusoe, where you been? Awk! Robinson Crusoe, where you been?

CHILD SCROOGE:

And Robinson Crusoe looked up in the tree and saw the parrot and knew he hadn't escapes and he was still there, still all alone there.

SCROOGE:

Poor Robinson Crusoe.

CHILD SCROOGE:

(sadly replacing teddy bear) Poor Robinson Crusoe.

SCROOGE:

Poor child. Poor child.

FIRST SPIRIT:

Why poor?

SCROOGE:

Fancy...fancy... *(He tries to mask his feelings by being brusque.)* it's his way, a child's way to...to lose being alone in...dreams, dreams...Never matter if they are all nonsense, yes, nonsense. But he'll be all right, grow out of it. Yes. Yes, he did outgrow it, the nonsense. Became a man and left there and he became, yes he became a man and...yes, successful...rich! *(The sadness returns.)* Never matter...never matter *(Fan runs in and goes to Child Scrooge.)* Fan!

FAN:

Brother, dear brother! *(She kisses Child Scrooge.)*

CHILD SCROOGE:

Dear, dear Fan.

FAN:

I've come to bring you home, home for good and ever. Come with me, come now. *(She takes his hand and they start to run off, but the spirit stops them and signals for the light on them to fade. They look at the spirit, aware of their role in the spirit's "education" of Scrooge.)*

SCROOGE:

Let me watch them go? Let them be happy for a moment! *(The spirit says nothing. Scrooge turns away from them and the light goes out.)* A delicate, delicate child. A breath might have withered her.

FIRST SPIRIT:

She dies a woman and had, as I remember, children.

SCROOGE:

One child.

FIRST SPIRIT:

Your nephew.

SCROOGE:

Yes, yes, Fred, my nephew. *(Scrooge pauses, then tries to bluster through.)* Well? Well all of us have that, haven't we? Childhoods? Sadness? But we grow and we become men, masters of ourselves. *(The spirit gestures for the music "Fezziwig's Party" to begin. It is heard first as from a great distance, then Scrooge becomes aware of it.)* I've no time for it, Spirit. Music and all your Christmas falderol. Yes, yes, I've learnt what you have to show me. *(Fezziwig, Young Ebenezer, and Dick appear, busily preparing for the party.)*

FEZZIWIG:

Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!

SCROOGE:

Fezziwig! It's old Fezziwig that I 'prenticed under.

FIRST SPIRIT:

Your master?

SCROOGE:

Oh, aye, and the best that any boy could have. There's Dick Wilkins! Bless me. He was very much attached to me was Dick. Poor Dick. Dear, dear.

FEZZIWIG:

Yo ho, my boys! No more work tonight. Christmas Eve, Dick! Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up before a man can say Jack Robinson! *(The music continues. Chandeliers are pulled into position, and mistletoe, holly, and ivy are draped over everything by*

bustling servants. Dancers fill the stage from Fezziwig's wonderful Christmas party. In the midst of the dancing and the gaiety servants pass back and forth through the crowd with huge platters of food. At a pause in the music, young Ebenezer, who is dancing, calls out.)

YOUNG EBENEZER:

Mr. Fezziwig, sir, you're a wonderful master!

SCROOGE and YOUNG EBENEZER:

A wonderful master!

SCROOGE:

(Echoing the phrase) A wonderful master! (The music changes suddenly and the dancers jerk into distorted postures and then begin to move in slow motion. The celebrants slowly exit, performing a macabre dance to the discordant sounds.)

FIRST SPIRIT:

Just because he gave us a party? It was very small.

SCROOGE:

Small!

FIRST SPIRIT:

He spent a few pounds of your "mortal" money, three, four at the most. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?

SCROOGE:

But it wasn't the money. He had the power to make us happy, to make our service light or burdensome. The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it had cost a fortune. That's what...a good master is.

FIRST SPIRIT:

Yes?

SCROOGE:

No, no, nothing.

FIRST SPIRIT:

Something, I think.

SCROOGE:

I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now, that's all.

FIRST SPIRIT:

But this is all in your past. Your clerk Cratchitt couldn't be here.

SCROOGE:

No, no, of course not, an idle thought. Are we done?

FIRST SPIRIT:

(Motioning for the waltz music to begin) Nearly.

SCROOGE:

(Hearing the waltz and remembering it) Surely it's enough. Haven't you tormented me enough? *(Young Ebenezer is seen waltzing with his sweetheart.)*

FIRST SPIRIT:

I only show the past, what it promised you. Look. Another promise.

SCROOGE:

Oh. Oh, yes. I had forgotten...her. Don't they dance beautifully? So young, so young. I would have married her if only...

SWEETHEART:

Can you love me, Ebenezer? I bring no dowry into my marriage, only me, only love. It is no currency that you can buy and sell with, but we can live with it. Can you? *(She pauses, then returns the ring Scrooge gave her as his pledge.)* I release you, Ebenezer, for the love of the man you once were. Will that man win me again, now that he is free?

SCROOGE:

(Trying to speak to her) If only you had held me to it. You should not have let me go. I was young, I did love you.

SWEETHEART:

(Speaking to Young Ebenezer) We have never lied to one another. May you be happy in the life you have chosen. Good-bye. *(She runs out. Young Ebenezer slowly leaves.)*

SCROOGE:

No, no, it was not meant that way...!

FIRST SPIRIT:

You cannot change now what you would not change then, I am your mistakes, Ebenezer Scrooge, all of the things you could have done and did not.

SCROOGE:

Then leave me! I have done with them. I shall live with them. As I have, as I do; as I will.

FIRST SPIRIT:

There is another Christmas, seven years ago, when Marley died.

SCROOGE:

No! I will not see it, I will not! He dies. I could not prevent it. I did not choose for him to die on Christmas Day.

FIRST SPIRIT:

And when his day was chosen, what did you do then?

SCROOGE:

I looked after his affairs.

FIRST SPIRIT:

His business.

SCROOGE:

Yes! His business! Mine! It was all I had, all that I could do in this world. I have nothing to do with the world to come after.

FIRST SPIRIT:

Then I will leave you.

SCROOGE:

Not yet! Don't leave me here! Tell me what I must do! What of the other spirits?

FIRST SPIRIT:

They will come.

SCROOGE:

And you? What of you?

FIRST SPIRIT:

I am always with you. (*The little girl appears with her doll; she takes Scrooge's hand and gently heads him to bed. Numbed, he follows her. She leans against the foot of the bed, ringing the doll and singing. The first spirit exits as she sings.*)

GIRL:

*When you wake, you shall have
All the pretty little horses,
Blacks and bays, dapples and grays,
All the pretty little horses.*

(*She rings the doll and the ringing becomes the chiming of Scrooge's bell. The girl exits. Scrooge sits upright in bed as he hears the chimes.*)

SCROOGE:

One minute until one. No one here. No one's coming. (*A larger clock strikes one o'clock.*)

Scene iv. The Spirit of Christmas Present

A light comes on. Scrooge becomes aware of it and goes slowly to it. He sees the second spirit, the Spirit of Christmas Present, who looks like Fezziwig.

SCROOGE:

Fezziwig!

SECOND SPIRIT:

Hello, Scrooge.

SCROOGE:

But you can't be...not Fezziwig.

SECOND SPIRIT:

Do you see me as him?

SCROOGE:

I do.

SECOND SPIRIT:

And hear me as him?

SCROOGE:

I do.

SECOND SPIRIT:

I wish I were the gentleman, so as not to disappoint you.

SCROOGE:

But you're not...?

SECOND SPIRIT:

No, Mr. Scrooge. You have never seen the like of me before. I am the Ghost of Christmas Present.

SCROOGE:

But...

SECOND SPIRIT:

You see what you will see, Scrooge, no more. Will you walk out with me this Christmas Eve?

SCROOGE:

But I am not yet dressed.

SECOND SPIRIT:

Take my tails, dear boy, we're leaving.

SCROOGE:

Wait!

SECOND SPIRIT:

What is it now?

SCROOGE:

Christmas Present, did you say?

SECOND SPIRIT:

I did.

SCROOGE:

Then we are traveling here? In this town? London? Just down there?

SECOND SPIRIT:

Yes, yes, of course.

SCROOGE:

Then could we walk? Your flying is...well, too sudden for an old man. Well?

SECOND SPIRIT:

It's your Christmas, Scrooge; I am only the guide.

SCROOGE:

(Puzzled) Then we can walk? *(The spirit nods.)* Where are you guiding me to?

SECOND SPIRIT:

Bob Cratchit's.

SCROOGE:

My clerk?

SECOND SPIRIT:

You did want to talk to him? *(Scrooge pauses, uncertain how to answer.)* Don't worry, Scrooge, you won't have to.

SCROOGE:

(Trying to change the subject, to cover his error) Shouldn't be much of a trip. With fifteen bob a week, how far off can it be?

SECOND SPIRIT:

A world away, Scrooge, at least that far. *(Scrooge and the spirit start to step off a curb when a funeral procession enters with a child's coffin, followed by the poorhouse children,*

who are singing. Seated on top of the coffin is the little girl. She and Scrooge look at one another.) That is the way to it, Scrooge. (The procession follows the coffin offstage; Scrooge and the spirit exit after the procession. As they leave, the lights focus on Mrs. Cratchit and her children. Mrs. Cratchit sings as she puts Tiny Tim and the other children to bed, all in one bed. She pulls a dark blanket over them.)

MRS. CRATCHIT:

(Singing)

*When you wake, you shall have
All the pretty little horses,
Blacks and bays, dapples and grays,
All the pretty little horses.*

To sleep now, all of you. Christmas tomorrow. *(She kisses them and goes to Bob Cratchit, who is by the hearth.)* How did our little Tiny Tim behave?

BOB CRATCHIT:

As good as gold and better. 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 for them to remember upon Christmas Day who made the lame to walk and the blind to see.

MRS. CRATCHIT:

He's a good boy *(The second spirit and Scrooge enter. Mrs. Cratchit feels a sudden draft.)* Oh, the wind. *(She gets up to shut the door.)*

SECOND SPIRIT:

Hurry. *(He nudges Scrooge in before Mrs. Cratchit shuts the door.)*

SCROOGE:

Hardly hospitable is what I'd say.

SECOND SPIRIT:

Oh, they'd say a great deal more, Scrooge, if they could see you.

SCROOGE:

Oh, they should, should they?

SECOND SPIRIT:

Well, I might have a word for them...

SCROOGE:

You're here to listen.

SECOND SPIRIT:

Oh. Oh yes, all right. By the fire?

SECOND SPIRIT:

But not a word.

BOB CRATCHIT:

(Raising his glass) My dear, to Mr. Scrooge. I give you Mr. Scrooge, the founder of the feast.

MRS. CRATCHIT:

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

BOB CRATCHIT:

My dear, Christmas Eve.

MRS. CRATCHIT:

It should be Christmas Eve, I'm sure, when one drinks to the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor dear.

BOB CRATCHIT:

I only know one thing on Christmas: that one must be charitable.

MRS. CRATCHIT:

I'll drink to his health for your sake and the day's, 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.

BOB CRATCHIT;

If he cannot be, we must be happy for him. A song is what's needed. Tim!

MRS. CRATCHIT:

Sush! I've just gotten him down and he needs all the sleep he can get.

BOB CRATCHIT:

If he's asleep on Christmas Eve, I'll be much mistaken. Tim! He must sing, dear, there is nothing else that might make him well.

TINY TIM:

Yes, Father?

BOB CRATCHIT:

Are you awake?

TINY TIM:

Just a little.

BOB CRATCHIT:

A song then! (*The children awaken and, led by Tiny Tim, sit up to sing "What Child Is This?" As they sing, Scrooge speaks.*)

SCROOGE:

Spirit. (*He holds up his hand; all stop singing and look at him.*) I...I have seen enough. (*When the spirit signals to the children, they leave the stage, singing the carol quietly. Tiny Tim remains, covered completely by the dark blanket, disappearing against the black.*) Tiny Tim...will he live?

SECOND SPIRIT:

He is very ill. Even song cannot keep him whole through a cold winter.

SCROOGE:

But you haven't told me!

SECOND SPIRIT:

(*Imitating Scrooge*) If he be like to die, he had better do it and decrease the surplus population. (*Scrooge turns away*) Erase, Scrooge, those words from your thoughts. You are not the judge. Do not judge, then. It may be that in the sight of heaven you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! To hear an insect on a leaf pronouncing that there is too much life among hid hungry brothers in the dust. Good-bye, Scrooge.

SCROOGE:

But is there no happiness in Christmas Present?

SECOND SPIRIT:

There is.

SCROOGE:

Take me there.

SECOND SPIRIT:

It is at the home of your nephew...

SCROOGE:

No!

SECOND SPIRIT:

(*Disgusted with Scrooge.*) Then there is none.

SCROOGE:

But that isn't enough... You must teach me!

SECOND SPIRIT:

Would you have a teacher, Scrooge? Look at your own words.

SCROOGE:

But the first spirit gave me more...!

SECOND SPIRIT:

He was Christmas Past. There was a lifetime he could choose from. I have only this day, one day, and you Scrooge. I have nearly lived my fill of both. Christmas Present must be gone at Midnight. That is near now. (*He speaks to two beggar children who pause shyly at the far side of the stage. The children are thin and wan; they are barefoot and wear filthy rags.*) Come. (*They go to him.*)

SCROOGE:

Is this the last spirit who is to come to me?

SECOND SPIRIT:

They are no spirits. They are real. Hunger, Ignorance. Not spirits, Scrooge, passing dreams. They are real. They walk your streets, look to you for comfort. And you deny them. Deny them not too long, Scrooge. They will grow and multiply and they will not remain children.

SCROOGE:

Have they no refuge, no resource?

SECOND SPIRIT:

(*Again imitating Scrooge*) Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses? (*Tenderly to the children*) Come. It's Christmas Eve. (*He leads them offstage.*)