

THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS

by

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*(Based on the book: The Man Who Invented  
Christmas  
By Les Standiford)*

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## THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS

FADE IN:

1 CARD: NEW YORK CITY. JUNE. 1841 1

In darkness we hear:

DICKENS (V.O.)

Dear Forster... How can I give you  
the faintest notion of my reception  
here in America?

2 OMIT 2

3 OMIT 3

4 INT. DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS 4

A STAGE MANAGER knocks and calls out in a Brooklyn accent:

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

Five minutes...five minutes

Ink stained fingers fumble with silver CUFF LINKS. A pair of  
BOOTS is smartly buffed. A brightly coloured SILK SCARF is  
adjusted.

DICKENS (V.O.)

Of the crowds that pour in and out  
the whole day; of the people that  
line the streets when I go out...

In the mirror, the writer (CHARLES DICKENS) looking like an  
English rock star in his prime (silk blouse, tight trousers,  
velvet jacket), fusses with the locks on his forehead, then  
steps back and regards himself critically.

DICKENS (V.O.)

....of the balls, dinners,  
speeches, parties, assemblies  
without end. There never was a king  
or Emperor upon the Earth, so  
cheered.

He breaks into a wide grin.

DICKENS

'Ello, Charlie.

Another knock at the door breaks the moment.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

Places, please. Places.

DICKENS (V.O.)

I have had deputations from the Far West, who have come from more than two thousand miles distance.

5 INT. PARK THEATER. CORRIDOR & STAGE- CONTINUOUS

5

Dickens moves along the corridor. The sounds of the crowd stomping their feet and clapping their hands gets louder as he nears the stage.

DICKENS (V.O.)

They come from the lakes, the rivers, the back-woods, the log-houses, the cities, factories, villages and towns-

A PRESENTER is making a flowery introduction on stage. The sound of the crowd is deafening.

PRESENTER

....The great magician of our time, whose wand is a book. The Shakespeare of the novel. The people's author.

Dickens reaches the wings. He breathes in deeply through his nose, steadying himself. He nods at the Stage Manager.

STAGE MANAGER

Ready?

DICKENS

Ready.

PRESENTER (O.S.)

... the one and only, the inimitable, the great and marvellous Boz! Ladies and gentlemen- Mr. Charles Dickens!

The stagehands raise the curtain. Dickens takes a deep breath and steps into the light. At the sight of him, the audience rises to its feet as one.

Behind him "TABLEAUX VIVANTS" appear, depicting sights and scenes of London, Beef Eaters roll out canons, characters from Oliver Twist come to life, urchins dance along to the band.

Dickens taking this in.

DICKENS (V.O.)  
Americans are friendly, earnest,  
hospitable, kind, frank,  
accomplished, warm-hearted, fervent  
and enthusiastic...

Uncertainly, he raises his arms above his head. The crowd goes wilder still, BLANKETING the stage with flowers and SCREAMING "BOZ, BOZ, BOZ".

Dickens attempts to speak to the crowd.

DICKENS  
Dear friends, you have welcomed me  
to your country with such open arms  
that I fear that I-

But his speech is cut off by a deafening volley as the cannons behind him fire ticker tape into the air. Dickens shrinks, covering his ears.

DICKENS (V.O.)  
I can't wait to get home.

6 OMIT

6

TITLE CARD: LONDON, OCTOBER, 1843

SIXTEEN MONTHS LATER

7 INT. DICKENS STUDY - MORNING

7

Dickens sits at his desk, pen in hand, in front of a blank piece of paper, as if willing something to appear.

After a moment, he throws the pen down and gets up to look in the mirror, making a face.

He picks up an ACCORDION and plays a few squeaky NOTES.

DICKENS  
(sings)  
Yanky doodle, doodle dandy  
Turn right round in the bottom of  
the gangy-

There is a tentative KNOCK at the door. He throws it open in frustration.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
Mrs. Fisk. I have told you  
repeatedly not to disturb me when  
I'm working.

MRS. FISK, the housekeeper, a rather severe Scotswoman, is taken aback.

MRS. FISK  
I beg your pardon sir. Only, Mr.  
Forster is here.

Beat.

DICKENS  
I'll be right down.

8 INT. DICKENS HOUSE/HALLWAY - MORNING

8

The front hall is full of workmen, including the energetic SIGNOR MAZZINI, who is busy directing traffic, as various of the DICKENS CHILDREN run in and out of the chaos.

SIGNOR MAZZINI  
Adesso! Subito! Veni qui!

Kate gives a tour to Dickens' friend and de facto literary manager, JOHN FORSTER -- a big, pleasant-looking man with a Geordie accent.

KATE  
You see, Mr. Forster, we're having  
all new wallpaper. French. New  
doors, new roller blinds for the  
windows, new book-cases in the  
library, all chosen by Charles, of  
course. And the staircase is to be  
painted green  
(to Signor Mazzini)  
-- though not too dull a green,  
Signor Mazzini.

SIGNOR MAZZINI  
Si, si. Capice.

KATE  
(to Forster)  
You know how Charles is.

FORSTER  
The best is good enough for me!

KATE  
I wish he'd redecorate that study  
of his. It's like an animal's den.  
But he won't let anyone touch it!

Two workmen pass between them carrying a large chandelier.

Scusi. Workman

KATE

Mr. Forster. If you will allow me:  
how do things stand between you and  
Miss Wigmore?

FORSTER

Splendid, Mrs. Dickens. In fact, I  
intend to ask her to bestow upon  
me the greatest happiness a man can  
ever know.

Kate stares at him, uncomprehending.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

To marry me.

KATE

Oh!

She embraces him, causing him to flush a deep crimson.

KATE (CONT'D)

I am very glad to hear it.

Dickens comes thundering down the stairs.

DICKENS

Forster. Good Lord. I completely  
lost track of the time.

Kate puts out a hand.

KATE

Charles. We need to pay Signor  
Mazzini. For the parlour mantle.

DICKENS

How much?

SIGNOR MAZZINI

Seventy-five pounds.

Dickens staggers back.

DICKENS

Seventy-five – what is it made of,  
gold?

SIGNOR MAZZINI

Carrara marble, Signor. Finest  
quality. No gentleman would accept  
less.

Beat.

DICKENS

I'll have the money for you when I  
return, Signor Mazzini.

Dickens turns to Forster.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Shall we?

Forster bows to Kate.

FORSTER

Good day, Mrs. Dickens.

KATE

Good day, Mr. Forster.

Dickens is nearly out the door, where a WORKMAN is busy  
attaching a shiny new knocker.

FORSTER

I'll hail us a cab.

DICKENS

Waste of money. We'll walk.

FORSTER

Walk? Are you mad?

Dickens rushes out, followed by Forster. They head down the  
street at pace, the London skyline in the distance.

DICKENS

The best way to lengthen our days  
is to walk steadily and with a  
purpose.

9 OMIT 9

10 INT. CHAPMAN AND HALL. OUTER OFFICE - DAY 10

A publishing house in The Strand. In the outside office, a  
nervous young CLERK listens to a heated conversation in the  
other room.

FORSTER (O.S.)

Gentlemen, we don't seem to  
understand one another. I asked you  
a simple question: where is the  
money?

CHAPMAN (O.S.)

The money, Mr. Forster—



FORSTER (O.S.)

Yes. Money. You know: Pounds,  
shillings, stumpy, shiners, joeys—

A huge CRASH, then silence. The clerk winces.

11

INT. CHAPMAN AND HALL. INNER OFFICE - DAY

11

Forster stands by an overturned tea trolley. Crockery everywhere. He gestures apologetically at the two publishers, CHAPMAN (rather portly and florid ) and HALL (tall and angular).

FORSTER

I do apologize.

He attempts to pick up the broken crockery.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

Bull in a china shop.

CHAPMAN

Please don't trouble yourself.

Forster resumes his tirade.

FORSTER

Charles Bloody Dickens! The best-selling bloody author in the history of English bloody literature —

He gestures towards Dickens. Dickens' lips are pressed together, his attention on a magazine publication. The headline on it reads "*Martin Chuzzlewit, A Tedious Journey.*"

FORSTER (CONT'D)

Three of his books you've published in the last year and a half. Three. So— where is the money?

CHAPMAN

Mr. Forster. Like you, we are as Puzzled as the Egyptians in their Fog.

FORSTER

Howzat?

HALL

The Excitement with which a Popular Reputation is Kept up to the Highest Selling Mark will always be Subject to Lulls too Capricious for Explanation.

FORSTER

Ahm still not followin'.

CHAPMAN

-Martin Chuzzlewit- a Masterpiece  
of the Picaresque Genre- and Yet-

HALL

Barnaby Rudge- a Fine Book- an  
Important Subject- But- alas-

CHAPMAN

And The Travel book- "American  
Notes"-

HALL

Perhaps- a Little Too Candid for  
our American Cousins-

FORSTER

No joke. I heard they were burning  
copies in the streets.

Forster notices Dickens pained look.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

Mad as snakes, the Yanks.

Forster renews his attack.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

And what about this fifty pounds a  
month you're withholding from his  
royalties? What's the explanation  
for that?

The two publishers squirm uncomfortably. Chapman produces the  
contract and peers at it to cover his nervousness.

HALL

You May Remember that when Mr.  
Dickens Approached us about the  
Tour to America, we were Pleased to  
Provide Him with an Interest-Free  
Loan -

He falters. Chapman continues.

CHAPMAN

With the Provision That- In the  
Unlikely Case of Profits being  
Inadequate to Certain Repayments-

Forster erupts.

FORSTER

Oh, divven't hoy me that ket, you sackless mairks.

The publishers exchange glances.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

So, he's had a few flops, who hasn't? Your publishing house wouldn't exist without this man!

Chapman gives Dickens a nervous look.

CHAPMAN

Actually, we do have a Suggestion—

HALL

— very Popular with the Reading Public —

CHAPMAN

Perhaps Mr. Dickens might consider—

HALL

— and a lot of Money to be Made in—

CHAPMAN

— a Railway Edition of his works?

Dickens is frowning.

FORSTER

You're not serious? Those cheap yellow-backed jobs? With adverts for fig syrup on the cover?

They all watch as Dickens gets to his feet. He turns the magazine publication over to obscure his bad *Chuzzlewit* review.

DICKENS

What about an advance?

CHAPMAN

-- on?

DICKENS

(bluffing)

...A new book.

HALL

You have a New Book in mind?

FORSTER

Of course he does...

CHAPMAN

Well, in that case, obviously. We'd  
Love to Consider it...

DICKENS

Consider it?

HALL

That is to say, If we Like it--

DICKENS

*If?*

CHAPMAN

I'm sure we will--

DICKENS

Gentlemen. I bid you good day.

He sweeps out of the room.

CHAPMAN

Mr. Forster: Please. We had no  
Intention of Causing Offense.

FORSTER

Ay. He's in a fettle now. Give him  
a day to calm down -

HALL

And then... It's Most Awkward...  
"He" was in last week. In some  
Difficulty. Again.

FORSTER

No, that's not possible. He's in  
the countryside. Under strict  
instructions to remain there.

Beat.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

What is it this time?

Chapman hands him a letter and an envelope.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

(reading)

"...need money immediately or  
productive of fatal consequences...  
I beseech you to do the needful..."

Forster shakes the envelope, causing several SLIPS OF PAPER  
to fall out, each one torn from a letter, each with a  
signature: Charles Dickens. Forster makes a face.

HALL

He's been Offering Mr. Dickens'  
Autographs for Sale in the  
Newspapers.

FORSTER

How much did you give him?

CHAPMAN

Forty-five, All Told.

FORSTER

Forty-five! - I'll pay you back for  
it. Not a word of this to Charles,  
do you hear?

12 EXT. GARRICK CLUB - AFTERNOON

12

A Georgian building near Covent Garden, once a private house,  
now a gentlemen's club, with a brass plate beside the door:  
THE GARRICK CLUB. And underneath, the motto: "ALL THE WORLD'S  
A STAGE." FORSTER rushes in, umbrella in hand.

13 INT. GARRICK CLUB. DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

13

A cozy dining room, typical of a Victorian men's club. Beside  
the bar, a group of SMART YOUNG MEN are gathered, gossiping  
and making quips. At the centre of the group is a tall fellow  
with a braying laugh (WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY).

Dickens stands by the cloak room, holding a newspaper in  
front of his face.

FORSTER (O.S.)

Charles?

Dickens folds down a corner of the newspaper.

DICKENS

Shhh...

FORSTER

What are you doing over here?

Dickens gestures towards the group.

DICKENS

I'm hiding. From Thackeray. He'll  
want to commiserate with me on my  
Chuzzlewit reviews. Which he will  
quote by heart.

Forster walks into the dining room. Dickens scuttles after  
him, taking care not to be seen by Thackeray. Forster grabs a  
chair and cranes his head around.

FORSTER

Where's Robertson? I'm clammin' for some scran.

Dickens slinks into another chair.

DICKENS

Why do we come here? The service is terrible. The food is inedible. And the fees keep going up –

An elderly WAITER appears and bows low, losing his balance. He fixes his gaze somewhere above their heads.

WAITER

Gentlemen?

FORSTER

You're not Robertson.

WAITER

The name is Marley, sir.

DICKENS

Marley?

Dickens gets out a pencil and a notebook.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

With an e?

The waiter's eyes flicker with apprehension.

WAITER

Yes, sir.

FORSTER

Don't worry. He collects names. Let's have some oysters. And a bottle of champagne.

WAITER

Very good, sir.

The waiter exits, at a stately pace.

DICKENS

Champagne?

FORSTER

We're celebrating.

THACKERAY (O.C.)

Celebrating?

Thackeray has somehow materialized at their table, an evil glint in his eyes.

DICKENS

Thackeray. How are you?

THACKERAY

Tolerable I thank ye. Charles. I must say, I'm relieved to see you out and about.

DICKENS

Relieved?

THACKERAY

You know. After those vile things they wrote about Chuzzlewit. I won't even call them reviews.

DICKENS

No matter, I never read them.

Forster shoots him a skeptical look.

THACKERAY

Quite right. Scandalous, what one is allowed to print nowadays.

He waits. Dickens grits his teeth.

DICKENS

Why? What did they say?

THACKERAY

"Dull, vapid, and vulgar... Not a single character capable of exciting the reader's sympathy."

(beat)

I certainly didn't think it was vulgar.

Dickens gives him a tight smile.

THACKERAY (CONT'D)

Oh, look! There's Macready. Poor thing. His Macbeth was absolutely shredded in The Times. I must go and give him my condolences.

Thackeray wafts away to rejoin the group at the bar.

DICKENS

I'm sick of London. Over-crowded, over-priced--

FORSTER

-You love this town-

DICKENS

- no place for a man without money.  
Not to mention the bloody fog--

FORSTER

It's your inspiration. You're what-  
do-you-call it? Magic lantern.

The waiter arrives. He opens the bottle with some difficulty,  
then bangs a plate of oysters down on the table and leaves.

DICKENS

I tell you, Forster, my lamp's gone  
out. I've run out of ideas. I feel  
old.

FORSTER

Old. Whssht. You're a puppy.

Forster pours some champagne.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

You're exhausted, that's what. Too  
many speeches.

DICKENS

I've got one tomorrow, for the  
Children's Refuge.

FORSTER

You have to learn to say no.

DICKENS

How can I? If I can be useful.

FORSTER

You'll have to. What with your new  
commission.

DICKENS

Forster, I just told you-

He stops himself.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

- what commission?

FORSTER

From Chapman and Hall. For your  
next book.

Forster grins and hands him a cheque.



FORSTER (CONT'D)

I told them you'd have the first chapter by the end of the year. You like a deadline.

Dickens stares at him.

DICKENS

Do you mind telling me what it's about?

FORSTER

Oh, I leave that up to youse.

He grins and helps himself to the oysters.

14 INT. STUDY - NIGHT

14

Dickens goes through a complicated pre-writing ritual: straightening everything on his desk, paper, ink, pen knife, quills; then rapidly touching his desk ornaments one by one: a CUP with fresh flowers in it, a pair of BRONZE TOADS, a RABBIT, and a CERAMIC MONKEY.

He places a blank sheet in front of him, dips his pen in ink, then stares at the paper, once again willing something to appear.

INK drips slowly from the pen onto the page.

He hears a strange, unearthly cry coming from nearby.

VOICE (O.S.)

Ul-ul-alul-alu!

He opens the door, listening.

15 INT. DICKENS HOUSE. NURSERY - NIGHT

15

Dickens descends the stairs to the nursery. A young nursemaid, TARA is telling a bedtime story to the children in a soft Irish lilt.

TARA

... And on Christmas Eve, they say, the fairy mounds open wide, and the fire spirits pour into the night... and then the Lord of the Dead leads all of the spirits in a Wild Hunt. And he calls to them...

She throws back her head.

TARA (CONT'D)

Ul-ul-alul-alu!

CHARLIE age 10, Dickens's oldest son, shivers with excitement and dread. Dickens lingers a moment, mesmerized.

16

INT. DICKENS BEDROOM - NIGHT

16

Dickens is in bed, going through the accounts book, while Kate reads a book called *Roughing it in the Bush*.

DICKENS

Do we have a new housemaid?

KATE

What? Oh, yes. Tara. She's Irish. Charley adores her.

The candle sputters. She lights a new one.

DICKENS

What are you doing?

She shows him the stub of the old candle.

KATE

It was only a stub.

DICKENS

There's another hour in that.

KATE

Oh, really, Charles.

DICKENS

If you carry on like this, we'll end up in the Poor House.

Kate laughs.

KATE

You are funny.

DICKENS

I'm not joking.

KATE

Charles. You give money to any and every beggar on the street. You insist on moving to a bigger house, and order all new fixtures, and then you complain about a new candle.

Dickens speaks with a fervid intensity.

DICKENS

I know whereof I speak, Kate. Debt is – an ogre. If you're not careful it can eat you up.

Beat.

KATE

Are we in trouble?

DICKENS

No. Of course not.

KATE

Then what – ?

DICKENS

Nothing.

Beat.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

I'm sick of writing tooth and nail for bread, that's all.

Kate has heard this before. She goes back to her book.

KATE

Mmmm...

DICKENS

I should have become a journalist.

KATE

You hate the press.

DICKENS

Or a lawyer.

KATE

"The law is an ass." I believe you wrote that.

DICKENS

A hairdresser, then. In the Burlington Arcade. "Hair Shampooed on the Oxford system."

Kate smiles.

KATE

Do you know what I should have liked to be?

Referring to her book—

KATE (CONT'D)

An explorer. Paddling a canoe.  
Somewhere in the wilds of Canada.  
In a pair of buckskin breeches...  
All on my own... No nappies to  
change...

She glances at Dickens, lost in his own thoughts.

KATE (CONT'D)

By the way, dear... I saw the  
doctor today.

This gets his attention.

DICKENS

Not- another Little Stranger?

She smiles.

KATE

Are you pleased?

Beat.

DICKENS

Of course! *Splendid.*

He stares straight ahead for a moment, then blows out the  
light.

FLASHBACK:

17 INT. DICKENS CHILDHOOD HOME - EVENING

17

A match flares and touches the wick of a magic lantern.

VOICE (O.S.)

And now for this year's Christmas  
present!

Above it, the genial face of a middle-aged man appears, (whom  
we will come to know as JOHN DICKENS). He is dressed in the  
elaborate headdress of a stage magician.

MR. DICKENS

I am the necromancer, Rhia Rhama  
Rhoos, educated cabalistically in  
the Orange Groves of Salamanca.  
Behold!

He CLAPS his hands, theatrically.

YOUNG CHARLES (AGE 10) and his six brothers and sisters are  
settled in front of a sheet hanging from the clothes horse.

Behind them we can see a table set for Christmas dinner with holly and mistletoe.

Mr. Dickens slips a painted slide into the magic lantern and an image appears on the sheet: an angel, hovering above a group of shepherds.

CHILDREN

Ohhh...

Then, a bearded hunter, with a stag over his shoulder.

CHILDREN(CONT'D)

Ahhh....

Then, Aladdin and his lantern.

CHILDREN(CONT'D)

Hooray!

On the faces of the children, there is a look of utter enchantment, but most particularly Young Charles.

A terrifying ghost appears next. Young Charles covers his face with his hands.

YOUNG CHARLES

No. Go away.

Mr. Dickens puts his hand on the young boy's head to comfort him.

Mr. DICKENS

It's all right, Charlie. I'm here.  
You're safe.

Young Charles climbs into his father's arms.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)

Here. Now. I'll show you how to get  
rid of bad spirits. Ready?

They CLAP their hands together. The light on the magic lantern goes out, and the Ghost disappears.

18 INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING (PRESENT) 18

Dickens awakes from his dream. Beside him, Kate sleeps peacefully.

19 INT. PARLOUR - MORNING 19

The Dickens children, Charley, MAMIE (age 5), KATE (4), WALTER (age 3) line up for inspection. Dickens bowls in using a different voice to talk to each child, starting with Mamie.

DICKENS

Mistress Chickenstalker. How are you this fine morning?

She giggles.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

What is the matter with your pinnie? It looks as if you have been caught in a cyclone.

She straightens it.

He moves on to Walter, standing as straight as he can. Dickens salutes.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Master Corporal Skittles. Sir.

He stares fixedly at Walter's shoes.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Ahem.

The little boy self-consciously rubs one on the back of his leg. Dickens nods, approvingly. He moves on to Kate.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Hello, Lucifer Box.

KATE

Hello, Papa.

Dickens offers her his handkerchief.

DICKENS

Would you do me the honour?

She blows her nose.

He arrives at Charley, clinging to the leg of Tara.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

A-ha. The Snodgering Blee. We meet at last.

Charley shrinks behind Tara.

CHARLEY

Morning, Pa.

Dickens inspects him up and down.

DICKENS

Much better, sir. But... What's this? You forgot to wash behind your ears.

Dickens pulls a coin from Charley's ear, to his delight.

TARA

Cor!

Dickens turns his attention to Tara.

DICKENS

Tara, is it?

TARA

Yes, sir.

Dickens notes the look of adoration on Charley's face.

Dickens

I see you've made a conquest.

Tara ruffles Charley's hair.

Dickens (CONT'D)

What were you telling the children last night? About the fairies?

Tara glances at Mrs. Fisk, nervously.

TARA

Only a story my gran used to tell us, sir. Back home in Ireland. She used to say that on Christmas Eve the veil between this world and the next thins out. And that's when the spirits cross over, and walk among us.

Dickens reflects on this.

DICKENS

Do they indeed?

20

INT/EXT. FREEMASON'S HALL - NIGHT

20

On the interior steps of the great hall, a sign announces: "A Benefit for the Children's Refuge. With Charles Dickens." Well-dressed PATRONS stream out.

Dickens walks out of the hall, shaking hands with a haughty Society Woman.

SOCIETY WOMAN #1

Thank you for coming. Such an  
*interesting* speech.

Another couple of SOCIETY LADIES go by, whispering.

SOCIETY LADY #2

... not nearly as handsome as I'd  
thought...

A red-faced industrialist, GRIMSBY, and his star-struck WIFE  
approach.

MRS. GRIMSBY

Oh, Mr. Dickens. It is such an  
honour to meet you.

Mr. Grimsby looks unimpressed.

MRS. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

We just adore your books.

MR. GRIMSBY

No, I don't.

MRS. GRIMSBY

Well, I love them.

MR. GRIMSBY

Nonsense. You just like a good cry.

Dickens gives him a strained smile.

DICKENS

What is it you particularly object  
to in my books?

MR. GRIMSBY

Pickpockets, streetwalkers, charity  
boys. Those people don't belong in  
books.

DICKENS

Those people? You mean, the poor?

They continue outside the building where Dickens indicates to  
a knot of BARE-FOOT URCHINS, watching from the shadows.  
Grimsby straightens up.

MR. GRIMSBY

Look here, Mr. Dickens. I'm a self-  
made man. I pulled myself up by my  
own bootstraps, never asked for  
anything from anyone that I wasn't  
willing to pay for.



DICKENS  
No help from anyone?

MR. GRIMSBY  
None.

MRS. GRIMSBY  
Well, Papa did give us a very small  
cotton mill for our wedding.

Mr. Grimsby ignores this, whilst shoeing away a poor urchin  
begging for money.

DICKENS  
What would you suggest we do about  
"those people"?

MR. GRIMSBY  
Are there no workhouses?

DICKENS  
Do you know that many people had  
rather die than go there?

MR. GRIMSBY  
Then they had better do it, and  
reduce the surplus population.

Dickens struggles to control his temper.

DICKENS  
Will you excuse me? I have a -- I  
must-- good evening.

He strides off.

21 EXT. LONDON STREETS - NIGHT

21

Dickens strides angrily through the chaotic, noisy streets of  
London, past WAITERS thrusting handbills into the hands of  
passersby, CABBIES soliciting fares, a BALLAD SINGER croaking  
out a tune, a barefooted CROSSING SWEEPER leaping into the  
street to clear away the manure.

A TOOTHLESS MAN in a long cloak approaches emerges out of the  
crowd and flashes Dickens a lop-sided grin.

TOOTHLESS MAN  
Care to buy? Hard workers. Suitable  
for factory work or chimney  
sweeping.

Moving aside his cloak he reveals two CHILDREN, a boy and a  
girl, pale and emaciated, clinging to his legs. Dickens reels  
back in shock.

DICKENS

Let them go! Let them go, or I'll  
have the police after you.

The man turns and runs, the children in tow. Dickens tries to give chase across the street, but is nearly knocked over by a large cart drawn by four horses. On the side the words are written: "Warren's Blacking: The Pride of Mankind".

Dickens freezes. He looks around. The toothless man and his children are gone. Hearing FOOTSTEPS, he gives chase down a darkened alleyway. Faster he goes, left, right, until he is completely disorientated.

22 EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

22

Turning a corner, Dickens finds himself in the graveyard of a church and collapses under a tree, exhausted. He closes his eyes.

VOICE #1 (O.S.)

I lift up mine eyes unto the hills  
From whence cometh my help  
My help cometh even from the Lord  
Who hath made heaven and earth--

A gravelly voice cuts him off.

VOICE #2 (O.S.)

-- All right. I'm not paying you by  
the hour. Skip to the end.

Dickens opens his eyes. In the glow of a lantern, a graveside burial is taking place, attended only by a red-nosed CLERIC in a threadbare black coat, and a LONE MOURNER in a black silk hat, and two stalwart GRAVE-DIGGERS.

CLERIC

(rapidly)

Rest eternal grant to him, O Lord:  
And let light perpetual shine upon  
him. Amen.

LONE MOURNER

Amen.

The Lone Mourner presses a coin into the clergyman's hand and strides away, clearly anxious to be gone.

The Grave-diggers shuffle towards the grave, spades in hand. Grave Digger #1 points towards the coffin.

GRAVE DIGGER #1

Shame, innit? All that money and no-  
one to mourn him.

GRAVE DIGGER #2  
-- except Old Scratch there.

He nods towards the departing Lone Mourner.

GRAVE DIGGER #1  
Who is he?

GRAVE DIGGER #2  
His business partner. The meanest  
cur on two legs, so they say.

Dickens shrinks against the wall as the Lone Mourner passes  
him, shooting him a look of pure malice.

LONE MOURNER  
*Humbug.*

Dickens recoils.

23 EXT./INT. DICKENS HOUSE - NIGHT

23

Dickens returns home, in a state of agitation, muttering to  
himself.

DICKENS  
Old Scratch... all that money...  
shame...

He reaches for the doorknocker when suddenly the door flies  
open. Dickens reacts as the knocker comes away in his hand.

MRS. FISK  
Good evening, sir.

DICKENS  
Indeed, Mrs. Fisk.

He hands her his hat, and heads for the stairs, holds on to  
the knocker, not quite sure what to do with it, past the  
dining room where the whole family sits waiting for him.

KATE  
Charles?

Dickens is oblivious.

DICKENS  
Humbug!

24 INT. STUDY - NIGHT

24

Dickens scribbles furiously, talking to himself, like a man  
possessed.

DICKENS (V.O.)

It's about a businessman. Or a factory owner. A miser. His partner dies. But he doesn't shed a tear. Thinks only of the money. And on Christmas Eve—

25 INT. CHAPMAN AND HALL. INNER OFFICE - MORNING

25

Dickens paces, flushed with excitement, referring to his hastily scrawled notes.

DICKENS

—on Christmas Eve— he meets some kind of, of, of, I don't know—

He gestures with his hands.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

—supernatural guides— or, spirits possibly— who in the course of one night, teach him what a miserable, loathsome, selfish toad he is. A short book. Short and sharp. A hammerblow to the heart of this smug, self-satisfied age.

Forster and the publishers nod their heads with enthusiasm, though it is clear they don't follow.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

It's a comedy.

Forster breathes out, with relief.

FORSTER

Ah-ha!

Hall

Brilliant.

CHAPMAN

Does it have a title?

DICKENS

Yes. It's called, A Christmas Ghost Story... No, uh— A Christmas— Song. Ballad. Something like that.

Chapman clears his throat, glances at Hall.

CHAPMAN

Intriguing. Really.... Er. One Question— Why Christmas?

Dickens's mouth twitches dangerously.

DICKENS

Why not?

Hall leaps into the fray.

HALL

Well, Christmas: Not what it Used  
to Be, what?

He chortles at his own joke.

CHAPMAN

I mean to say, Does Anyone Still  
Celebrate It? Other than our Clerk?  
Who Never misses an Opportunity to  
Take a Day off with Pay!

HALL

Indeed! Ha, ha. More or less an  
Excuse for Picking a Man's Pocket  
every Twenty-fifth of December!

Dickens stares at them. Hall shifts uncomfortably. An awkward  
silence.

CHAPMAN

What We Mean to Say, Mr. Dickens,  
is, Not Much Market for "Christmas  
Books"....What?

Dickens tries to control his rising temper.

Dickens

It is a Christmas book because  
Christmas is- or ought to be- the  
one time of the year when men and  
women open their shut-up hearts,  
and think of the people below them  
as if they really were fellow-  
passengers to the grave, and not  
another race of creatures  
altogether.

Hall nods, vigorously.

HALL

Indeed.

CHAPMAN

Mr. Dickens. We are Already Halfway  
Through October.

(MORE)

CHAPMAN (CONT'D)

Even if you Had already Written it,  
we couldn't Possibly Get it  
Illustrated, Typeset, Printed and  
Bound, Advertised and Distributed  
to Shops in only Six Weeks.

Dickens voice is calm, but his eyes blaze.

DICKENS

I see. Well, gentlemen. Thank you  
for your opinion.

And with that, he rips up the cheque Forster had given him  
and sweeps out of the room.

CHAPMAN

Mr. Dickens!

26

EXT. LONDON STREET -DAY

26

Dickens hastens down the street. Forster catches him by the  
sleeve.

DICKENS

-the scaly-headed vultures- money  
grubbing, scum-sucking-

FORSTER

Charles.

DICKENS

I'll do it myself.

FORSTER

WHAT?

DICKENS

I will pay for it, all of it,  
including the illustrations, and  
distribute myself.

FORSTER

Charles. This is madness. Think of  
your finances! Let's go back and  
renegotiate. No shame in it. It's  
just business. Why throw everything  
over for a-a- minor holiday?

Dickens regards him coldly.

DICKENS

My mind is made up, John. I've  
never felt so strongly about  
anything in my life. You can help  
me, or not. As you wish.

Dickens storms off, heading straight for a nearby Tailors Shop.

FORSTER  
Where are you off to?

DICKENS  
To raise some capital.

FORSTER  
Eh?

DICKENS  
(off his look)  
One thing I've learned from my  
father: people will believe  
anything if you're properly  
dressed.

27 OMIT 27

28 EXT. RAILWAY STATION - DAY 28

Through the steam from the engines, a NATTILY-DRESSED MAN helps his WIFE down from the train. We can't quite make out his features at first. Then he turns and we see that it is MR. DICKENS SR., older than before but still as ebullient.

MR. DICKENS  
Nothing like the air of the  
metropolis to put colour in your  
cheeks, eh mother?

Mrs. Dickens inhales deeply.

29 INT. HADDOCK'S OFFICE - DAY 29

Forster and Dickens, in his new clothes, perch on uncomfortable chairs in the office of his solicitor. Dickens's eyes dart around the room: at the PAPERS stained with coffee, GLASSES WITH MOLD halfway up the side. A SAFE, wound round and about with heavy chains.

The door flies open and THOMAS HADDOCK, appears, in a faded coat over a threadbare waistcoat.

HADDOCK  
Mr. Dickens. Mr. Forster. How do  
you?

DICKENS  
Very well, thank you, Mr. Haddock.

HADDOCK  
*Mittens.* Bad boy.

He picks an evil-looking cat off his chair and sits down.

HADDOCK (CONT'D)  
Now. How can I be of service?

DICKENS  
Well, sir, it's about the loan--

MR. HADDOCK  
- come to think of it, there was something I wanted to tell you.  
What was it?

Haddock gets up and starts to rifle through some DOG-EARED FILES on the desk.

HADDOCK  
It was rather good news, as I recall--

Haddock finds a plate of biscuits under one of the files them and offers them to Forster.

FORSTER  
Thank you. Ow!

The cat has leapt onto his lap.

HADDOCK  
Mittens! You rascal... What was I--

DICKENS  
You said you had good news. About the lawsuit?

HADDOCK  
Lawsuit?

DICKENS  
Copyright infringement.

HADDOCK  
Eh?

FORSTER  
*Oliver Twisted. "As Re-originated from the Original."*

Haddock has found the file.

HADDOCK  
Oh, yes! Here it is. Good news indeed. We won.



DICKENS

What?

HADDOCK

The fine was set at twenty-two hundred pounds.

Dickens nearly cries with relief.

DICKENS

Twenty-two hundred— Oh, Haddock.  
You can't think how relieved I am.  
The pirates are beaten—

HADDOCK

The bad news is the defendants have no money.

Beat.

DICKENS

What?

HADDOCK

Bankrupt... Disappointing, I know... Of course, we could have them arrested. Throw them in the debtor's prison.

Dickens shakes his head, repulsed.

DICKENS

No. No. No.

HADDOCK

As you wish. Meanwhile, if you would be so good.

Haddock unlocks a METAL CASE wrapped round with CHAINS and takes out a paper, stamped "Payment on Demand".

HADDOCK (CONT'D)

Here's my bill. No rush. Next week will be fine.

Haddock dips his biscuit in his tea, placidly. Dickens attempts to stifle his anxiety.

DICKENS

The thing is, Haddock...

He glances at Forster.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

I'm waiting for a big royalty cheque from America. A trifling sum— what was it, 400 pounds, Forster?

Forster nearly chokes on his biscuit.

FORSTER

Mm? Something like that.

The solicitor listens attentively.

DICKENS

Tell you what... why don't we defer this bill until, say January. And, while we're at it, perhaps you might add a little more to it. I'll make it worth your while.

HADDOCK

More? You mean, borrow more?

DICKENS

Not much— perhaps 300 pounds? Until— until, January.

Forster reaches for the tea. The solicitor thinks. Dickens looks pale, wipes his brow.

HADDOCK

I'm sure we can work something out. At, say, twenty-five percent?

Forster can't contain himself.

FORSTER

God's teeth!

The cat leaps off Forster's lap with a piteous MEOW. Dickens is not well. Ashen.

HADDOCK

However, I will require the money to be repaid at the end of January without fail.

DICKENS

Of course. Forster here will sort out the details with you.

Dickens walks carefully from the room, as if he might faint.

30 EXT. HADDOCK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 30

Dickens hastens down the street, and turns the corner. He leans up against the wall, eyes closed, sweating.

FORSTER (O.S.)

Charles?

Dickens opens his eyes to find FORSTER looking at him closely. He claps him on the shoulder.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

Charles? Are you all right?

Dickens straightens up, shrugging off the moment.

DICKENS

A kidney spasm. That's all.

He stalks off.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

(over his shoulder)

Find me an illustrator.

31 INT. PAWNSHOP - DAY 31

Mr. Dickens Senior is showing a PAWNBROKER a book as his wife looks on.

MR. DICKENS

Best quality, sir. Al condition....  
and look -

He opens the cover.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)

Inscribed by the author.

The pawnbroker peers at the handwritten inscription.

PAWNBROKER

To Papa. Love, Charles.

The pawnbroker examines Dickens Senior skeptically.

PAWNBROKER (CONT'D)

Five bob.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hallo old girl. Hallo old girl.

Mr. Dickens looks up to see a CAGED CROW, walking up and down on his perch. Mr. Dickens's face lights up. He turns back to the pawnbroker.

MR. DICKENS

Perhaps we might strike a bargain?

32 INT. HALLWAY - DAY 32

Outside the study, a trio of servants and Tara are giggling as they listen to the master making strange noises.

DICKENS

Oh but he was a tight-fisted hand  
at the grindstone, old- ...  
Scratch? Scrounger?...

33 INT. STUDY - DAY 33

DICKENS

- a covetous old sinner! ... old -  
whatshisname!

He throws his pen down in frustration.

34 INT. HALLWAY - DAY 34

DICKENS (O.S.)

....Screwpull.... Scrabbly...  
scr-rrrr-aahhh- chh...aahhh

They push Tara forward.

SERVANT

Go on. He won't bite.

Tara knocks softly on the door, and opens it.

35 INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS 35

Tara enters. Dickens is nowhere to be seen. She tiptoes over to the fire. Suddenly, she hears-

DICKENS (O.S.)

Mr.... Scrimple!

She squeals with terror. Dickens sits up from the couch where he has been lying and takes the handkerchief off his face.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

You, what are you doing in here?

TARA

I've just come to see to the fire,  
sir.

DICKENS

I'm not to be interrupted under any  
circumstances. Do you hear?

TARA

I beg your pardon, sir. It won't happen again.

Tara turns to go.

DICKENS

Wait. What's that in your pocket?

Tara's takes out a Penny Dreadful magazine and reluctantly hands it over to Dickens. Dickens examines the cover: a winged vampire with bloody teeth.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

"Varney the Vampire: The Feast of Blood." Any good?

TARA

Oh, yes, sir. Thrilling.

He smiles.

DICKENS

Where did you learn to read?

TARA

My mum taught me. But then she died. So, I had to go to the Grubber.

Dickens recoils.

DICKENS

The Workhouse?

TARA

You won't tell Mrs. Fisk, will you? She'd think I was shirking.

DICKENS

It will be our secret.

Dickens plucks a book off the shelf: The Arabian Nights.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

In fact, I'll make you a trade. Varney the Vampire for... Aladdin and his Magic Lamp.

She takes the book in her hands with awe.

TARA

Oh. My.

DICKENS

Read it and tell me what you think.

TARA

Thank you, sir.

She hesitates.

TARA (CONT'D)

Who is Scrimple?

DICKENS

Scrimple?

TARA

When I came in... You was saying-

DICKENS

It's just a name. In a story I'm concocting. You get the name right and then- if you're lucky - the character will appear.

Tara eyes dart around the room.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

He's not here yet.

He smiles. Then is struck by a thought. He starts to pace, oblivious to her.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Scrantish?

Tara tiptoes out, unobserved.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

S-c-rarmer-... S-c-r-ungge. No!  
Come on, come on, you old sinner.

He closes his eyes, conjuring up the image of the Lone Mourner in his mind.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

SCROOGE!

A sudden gust of wind makes the fire leap up, the papers fly around the room.

SCROOGE (O.S.)

Shut the window! Do you think I am  
made of money?

Dickens jumps. Behind him, SCROOGE, dressed as the Lone Mourner. Dickens is awe-struck.

DICKENS

Mr. Scrooge. How delightful to meet you, sir.

SCROOGE

I'm sorry I can't say the same.

DICKENS

Come now, Mr. Scrooge. Don't be standoffish. We ought to be friends.

SCROOGE

Don't have friends. Don't need 'em.

Dickens laughs.

DICKENS

Naturally.... I know. Let's play a game.

SCROOGE

I don't like games.

DICKENS

Humour me... What do you think of when I say the word "Darkness".

SCROOGE

Cheap.

DICKENS

Love.

SCROOGE

A Swindle.

DICKENS

Money.

SCROOGE

Security.

DICKENS

Children.

SCROOGE

Nuisances.

DICKENS

Workhouse.

SCROOGE

Useful.

DICKENS  
Christmas.

A strange look passes over Scrooge's face.

SCROOGE  
Christmas.

DICKENS  
That's right.

Dickens leans in, pen at the ready. They both jump at the sound of a piercing SCREAM.

MRS. FISK (O.S.)  
Help! Help! Get it away!

Dickens throws open the door.

36 INT. FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS

36

Dickens thunders down the stairs.

DICKENS  
What is going on?

He sees Miss Fisk cowering in a corner, as a large RAVEN makes a dive at her head.

MRS. FISK  
Get it away! The filthy thing!

The children laugh and clap their hands as Mr. Dickens waves a cage at the bird.

MR. DICKENS  
Come on now, Grip. Back in your cage, old chap.

DICKENS  
Father?

MR. DICKENS  
Charles! Good day!

DICKENS  
What are you doing here?

MR. DICKENS  
I was in the neighbourhood. Thought I'd drop by with a present for the children.

CHARLEY  
His name is Grip! He talks!



Grip is on a ledge, marching back and forth in agitation.

CHILDREN

Can we keep him?

GRIP

Halloa, old girl. Halloa old girl.

Mrs. Fisk clutches the edge of the bannister.

MRS. FISK

It's bad luck. A bird in the house.  
It means death.

Dickens motions for his father to move into the parlour.

37

INT. PARLOUR - CONTINUOUS

37

Dickens turns to address his father.

DICKENS

What are you doing back in London?

MR. DICKENS

My dear Charles. I will not  
disguise from you, that this is not  
the ardor with which a loving  
father might be expected—

DICKENS

You are supposed to be in Devon.

MR. DICKENS

Ha, banishment! Be merciful, say  
'death;'  
For exile hath more terror in his  
look—'

DICKENS

We had an agreement. I bought you a  
house. Gave you an allowance.

Mr. Dickens looks sheepish.

MR. DICKENS

And you know how very grateful I  
am. As for me, I'm happy wherever  
the weather. But your Mother— is of  
a more delicate sensibility. The  
sight of cows causes her actual  
physical pain.

DICKENS

Father—

MR. DICKENS

And then you see, I need to do some research in the London Library.

Dickens is skeptical of this.

DICKENS

Research?

MR. DICKENS

I have a commission from the Spectator. To write a feature on the Bank Charter Act. The editor was greatly impressed by my series on Marine Insurance.

Kate and Mrs. Dickens appear in the doorway.

KATE

Good for you, Father. And I hope you and Mother will stay here with us.

She shoots a look at Dickens.

KATE (CONT'D)

The children and I will enjoy having some company in the evening.

Mr. Dickens glances at his son, apprehensively.

DICKENS

(relenting)

The Spectator. Most impressive.

MR. DICKENS

Thank you my boy...

(dropping his voice)

Er. You couldn't perhaps lend me a tenner? The fellow took my last farthing for the cage.

Suddenly there is an ominous CRASH in the hallway. They run to see Grip, perched on the new chandelier, causing bits and pieces to fall to the floor.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)

I'll see that's all cleaned up.

The children surround Mr. Dickens, delighted, as Dickens holds his tongue and heads back upstairs.

Dickens paces, gripping his hair in frustration.

DICKENS

Gah! "This is not the ardor, with  
which a loving father--"

He throws himself down on the couch. He looks up and sees  
Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Humbug.

DICKENS

What is?

SCROOGE

Christmas.

Dickens sits up.

DICKENS

What about it?

SCROOGE

What is it but an excuse for  
picking a man's pocket every twenty-  
fifth of December?...

Dickens jumps up and runs to his desk and rapidly goes  
through his pre-writing ritual.

DICKENS

Yes, yes! Keep going.

SCROOGE

...a time for paying bills without  
money....

Dickens starts to write, furiously.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

...a time for finding yourself a  
year older and not an hour richer.

DICKENS

Excellent.

SCROOGE

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. He should.

Dickens laughs out loud. He looks at Scrooge, admiringly.

DICKENS

Oh, Mr. Scrooge. You and I are going to do great things together.

Dickens starts scratching away, while Scrooge peers over his shoulder, smiling.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Oh, but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge. A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained and solitary as an oyster.

Dickens glances over his shoulder. Scrooge immediately rearranges his features into a scowl.

There is a KNOCK at the door.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)

Charles?

Scrooge disappears. Mr. Dickens pokes his head in, smiling.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)

Hard at work?

Dickens grits his teeth.

DICKENS

What can I help you with, Father?

MR. DICKENS

I wondered if we might have an extra candlestick for our room?

DICKENS

Of course.

He hands him a candlestick. Mr. Dickens eyes a box on the mantelpiece.

MR. DICKENS

Oooo. Are those cigars?

Mr. Dickens advances into the room.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)

I must confess, I have acquired an irrepressible habit of smoking whilst I write. Shameful, I know.

He pockets the box.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)

Well. I won't detain you.

He tiptoes out. Dickens picks up the doorknocker from the front door, now sat on his desk, and raps on it a few times, angrily. Scrooge immediately reappears, a look of alarm on his face.

SCROOGE

Don't do that.

DICKENS

Why?

SCROOGE

He'll think he's being summoned--

Suddenly, the air is filled with a terrible clanking sound, as of chains being dragged up the stairs and the hallway. Scrooge looks terrified.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Too late.

DICKENS

Who is it?

Scrooge is too terrified to speak. Dickens picks up his book of names, rapidly flipping through the list.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Uh...Bunsby. Clennam. Heep...Hexam.

SCROOGE

Stop.

DICKENS

Magwitch?... *Marley*...

The lights in the room dim one by one. Suddenly, the door flies open and the ghost of JACOB MARLEY (bearing a strong resemblance to his solicitor, Haddock), covered in chains, padlocks, cash-boxes and steel purses, appears. Scrooge attempts a smile.

SCROOGE

Jacob? Is that you?

Dickens looks at Scrooge.

DICKENS

You know him?

SCROOGE

My business partner. Last I saw  
him, he was dead as a doornail.

The ghost gives out a dreadful howl.

MARLEY

Business! Mankind was my business!  
The common welfare was my business;  
charity, mercy, forbearance, and  
benevolence, were, all, my  
business. But I did none of these.

SCROOGE

He was never one for a straight  
answer.

The ghost gives another howl.

DICKENS

Come in, I pray you.

Marley clanks into the room, dragging his chains.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

You are in chains. Tell me why.

MARLEY

I wear the chain I forged in life.  
I made it link by link, and yard by  
yard. I girded it on of my own free  
will, and of my own free will I  
wore it.

DICKENS

Indeed.

MARLEY

Is its pattern strange to you?

Dickens starts to write.

DICKENS

.... strange to you....

MARLEY

Or would you know the weight and  
length of the strong coil you bear  
yourself?

Dickens looks up. Marley is staring straight at him. Dickens  
takes a careful step towards Marley.

DICKENS

You mean him, surely.

Marley leans towards him, confidentially. He walks around Dickens, circling him with a loose chain.

MARLEY

*Chains* man, all around you. Past...  
and present... and what is to come.

Dickens stares at him, his mind racing. And with that, Marley pulls the loose chain tight around Dickens.

FLASHBACK:

39 INT. DICKENS FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

39

The children crowd around the Christmas table. Mr. Dickens at the head, in a richly patterned waistcoat.

A cheer goes up as Mrs. Dickens, sets a large turkey down on the table. Mr. Dickens holds up his hands for silence. He intones.

MR. DICKENS

Hail to thee blithe turkey. Whose  
exquisite odours now perfume the  
circumambient air. So let this day  
be fragrant with the love we bear  
each other. And may God bless us  
everyone.

He winks at YOUNG CHARLES, who stares up at him with adoration.

YOUNG CHARLES

....every one.

Suddenly, the door flies open. A BAILIFF fills the door frame, accompanied by two burly Deputies.

BAILIFF

Mr. John Dickens?

MR. DICKENS

That is my name.

BAILIFF

Come with me.

MR. DICKENS

What is the meaning of this  
termagant breach of our Yuletide  
feast?

BAILIFF

Eh?

MR. DICKENS

What is the matter?

BAILIFF

The matter is a debt of some forty pounds and ten shillings. Fourteen months in arrears.

The bailiff holds out a set of handcuffs.

BAILIFF (CONT'D)

If you please.

The deputies enter the room, and start loading household goods onto a cart, furniture, silverware, books, anything they can get their hands on.

MR. DICKENS

Gentlemen! Please! This is all a misunderstanding. A circumstance of great moment to me is to be decided in the ensuing term -

Young Charles bursts into tears.

YOUNG CHARLES

Tell them to stop. Tell them to stop!

A handcuffed Mr. Dickens is helpless to comfort him. As he struggles to reach Charles, he knocks the magic lantern and it falls, shattering on the ground.

40 INT. DICKEN STUDY- MORNING 40

Dickens wakes with a start. He is lying on the couch. He looks around. The room is empty.

41 EXT. ST. JAMES PARK - DAY 41

Dickens marches along the foot path, with Forster struggling to keep up.

DICKENS

What about Leech? For the illustrations.

FORSTER

Leech? He's so prickly. And by no means the cheapest-

DICKENS

I don't want the cheapest-



FORSTER

-Charles. For God's sake, slow  
down. You move at railway speed.

Dickens slows down slightly.

DICKENS

I want the best.

FORSTER

It's going well then?

DICKENS

What?

FORSTER

The book.

DICKENS

Brilliant. Best thing I've ever  
done.

FORSTER

So you're--

DICKENS

I have eleven pages.

FORSTER

- *Eleven?*

DICKENS

If it weren't for the constant  
interruptions - you know my  
father's staying with us?

FORSTER

Oh.

DICKENS

Indeed. He could not have come at a  
worse time-

Forster is distracted by the sight of a pretty young woman  
(CHARLOTTE WIGMORE, age 25) walking by with a CHAPERONE.

FORSTER

Oh!

Charlotte's face lights up at the sight of Forster. Her  
companion turns her around to walk the other way.

DICKENS

Who was that?

FORSTER  
Charlotte.

DICKENS  
Who?

FORSTER  
My fiancée. I told you--

DICKENS  
Fiancée?

FORSTER  
She's a canny lass, is she not?

DICKENS  
Indeed, most amiable.

FORSTER  
Amiable? Why man, she's an angel, a sylph, a- I don't know what.

Suddenly Forster bursts into tears. Dickens stares at him, perplexed.

DICKENS  
Whatever is the matter?

FORSTER  
Charlotte and I - have come to a parting of the ways.

DICKENS  
I thought you said you were engaged-

FORSTER  
Were. Her father had no intention for her to marry the son of a Gateshead butcher.

Dickens tries to think what to say.

DICKENS  
Perhaps its for the best. The life matrimonial... it's not for everyone, old stick.

Forster manfully masters his emotions.

FORSTER  
No doubt. No doubt.

Forster blows his nose.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

So... Leech?

DICKENS

That's the ticket.

42 INT. LEECH'S STUDIO - DAY

42

Dickens and Forster visit LEECH, an eccentric-looking man, with hair like a rooster. Forster studies the framed cartoons on the wall as Dickens describes his vision to Leech.

DICKENS

Four wood cuts and four etchings.  
The cover in red. Hand-coloured.  
The title in rustic writing. The  
end papers to be green and all  
three edges to be gilded.

LEECH

*Gilded?* That will cost you.

DICKENS

It must be exquisite. That's why we  
came to you.

LEECH

You'll have to sell every copy to  
make your money back.

DICKENS

That is my intention, Mr. Leech.

Leech purses his lips together.

LEECH

Have you brought the manuscript?

DICKENS

I'll have something for you in a  
week.

LEECH

A week? That leaves only four weeks  
to do the illustrations and get it  
to the printers in time for  
Christmas.

DICKENS

Can you do it?

LEECH

Mr. Dickens. I am not a hired hand.  
I am an artist. What you are asking  
is impossible.

DICKENS

Impossible for an ordinary man,  
yes. But you are no ordinary man,  
Mr. Leech. You are a genius.

Leech draws himself up like a poker.

LEECH

Fifty pounds. Paid in advance. Plus  
more for the plates.

Dickens hesitates.

DICKENS

Done.

Forster passes his hand over his face as Dickens heads for  
the door.

FORSTER

Charles-

43 EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

43

Forster confronts Dickens on the street outside Leech's  
studio.

FORSTER

Look, Charles, I don't mean to be  
the voice of doom but before we lay  
out money for illustrations, we  
should consider what happens if you  
don't finish on time.

DICKENS

I *will* finish on time.

Forster doesn't have the heart to pursue it.

FORSTER

Quite.

44 EXT. DICKENS HOUSE -DAY

44

Dickens arrives home. The door is open. A workman stands by  
it, perplexed by the missing door knocker.

45 INT. DICKENS HALLWAY - DAY

45

Dickens steps in. Mrs. Fisk takes his hat.

DICKENS

Thank you-

Signor Mazzini is fixing the chandelier.

SIGNOR MAZZINI  
Mr. Dickens. I fix. See?

DICKENS  
Yes. Grazie, Mr. Mazzini.

SIGNOR MAZZINI  
Is no problem. No problem! Only  
twelve guineas extra!

There is a sound of LAUGHTER in the parlour above. Dickens  
turns to Mrs. Fisk.

DICKENS  
I thought my father was off to the  
British library.

MRS. FISK  
It's your sister, sir. Come from  
Manchester with her little boy.

46 INT. PARLOUR - CONTINUOUS

46

Dickens' sister FANNY (mid-thirties, pretty but faded) is on  
the floor, with her young son, HENRY JR, and all the Dickens  
children, playing with a toy theatre. Henry's father, the  
REVEREND HENRY BURNETT looks on, beaming.

DICKENS  
Fanny!

Fanny glances up.

FANNY  
Charlie!

She jumps up to embrace her brother.

DICKENS  
Henry. How are you?

Dickens shakes the Reverend Henry's hand.

REVEREND HENRY  
Very well, grace be to God.

Dickens smiles at his nephew on the floor.

DICKENS  
Master Henry. I hardly recognize  
you. How old are you now?

Henry struggles to his feet, with the help of a crutch.

YOUNG HENRY

Nine, if you please sir.

He coughs, violently.

DICKENS

Nine. Is it possible?

Tara enters, a little shyly.

TARA

Excuse me, sir. The children's tea  
is ready in the dining room.

REVEREND HENRY

Come on, then young 'un.

The Reverend puts Young Henry on his shoulders, and follows  
Tara and the other children out the door and down the stairs.

Fanny watches them go.

FANNY

There goes my heart.

DICKENS

What did the doctor say?

FANNY

He says we have to wait and see.

DICKENS

Fanny. Won't you let me help?

FANNY

We'll manage.

DICKENS

At least until Henry gets a new  
position?

FANNY

Something will turn up. I'm sure of  
it.

DICKENS

You sound like father.

She smiles.

FANNY

How is the old reprobate?

Dickens adopts their father's tone of voice.

DICKENS

"This morning I had twenty-five shillings in my hand and now...

He holds out his hands.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

"Observe the vacancy."

They laugh.

FANNY

He means no harm.

DICKENS

It's not enough. He bobs along like a cork on the surface of life, no thought for the future--

Fanny puts her hand on his arm.

FANNY

Charlie. Let it go, can't you?

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)

Abaft, you scurvy pirates!

Dickens and Fanny crack open the door. Mr. Dickens, has just arrived home, Young Henry at his side. The children are crowded around him, rummaging in his pockets for gifts as he shouts, uproariously.

MR DICKENS

Brail up your capstan-bar!  
Sheepshank your mizzen! Full speed ahead!

She smiles.

KATE

For all his faults, you won't find a kinder man.

Dickens sighs.

DICKENS

How long he is growing up to be one.

47

INT. DICKENS BEDROOM - NIGHT

47

Dickens wakes up with a start. Scrooge is standing over him, with a candle.

DICKENS  
(whispers)  
Why are you here?

SCROOGE  
You'd better come and see who's  
turned up.

Beside him, in bed, Kate stirs.

KATE  
Charles?

Dickens puts his finger to his lips.

DICKENS  
Just a touch of indigestion... Go  
back to sleep.

Dickens and Scrooge creep out.



48 INT. STUDY - NIGHT

48

Dickens and Scrooge stare at a ghostly figure (looking a good deal like Tara), dressed in white, wearing a wreath on her head. She stands by the window where the muslin curtains float eerily around her in the wind.

SCROOGE

Tell him who you are.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

The Ghost gestures towards the window.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST (CONT'D)

Follow.

SCROOGE

It's awfully late and I'm not quite dressed.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Follow.

Scrooge draws back.

SCROOGE

Not bloody likely.

DICKENS

Why?

SCROOGE

Mucking around in the past? What's the point?

DICKENS

You might learn something.

SCROOGE

I already know everything I need to know.

(to the Ghost)

Take him, why don't you?

DICKENS

Me?

SCROOGE

If you're so keen.

The ghost turns her gaze to Dickens.

DICKENS

It's not about me.

SCROOGE

You're the author aren't you?

Dickens looks at the ghost, fearful. He doesn't move. The Ghost turns to look at the slightly ajar window, which now SLAMS wide open.

49

EXT. WARREN'S BLACKING FACTORY - NIGHT

49

Young Charles holds his father's hand tightly, through the bars of a bailiff's van, trying to keep from crying. The rest of the family are huddled together behind his father in the van.

MR. DICKENS

Don't cry, Charlie. We'll be back for you before you know it.

YOUNG CHARLES

But why can't I stay with you?

MR. DICKENS

You're a big boy now, Charlie. You need to help out. You'll see.

(MORE)

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)  
It will be an adventure. You'll  
hardly think of us at all.

Behind him, the bailiff climbs on board the van.

BAILIFF  
Time to go.

Young Charles starts to cry.

MR. DICKENS  
Now, sir, enough of that. Stand up  
tall. Blood of iron, heart of ice.

The van starts to move off. Young Charles lets go of his  
father's hands.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)  
(shouting back)  
Remember: you are the son of John  
Dickens. A Gentleman. You be sure  
and tell them that!

The van disappears around the corner. The boy turns and looks  
with dread at the old, tumbledown building, beneath the sign  
WARRENS BLACKING: "The Pride of Mankind". A door opens  
spilling some light.

YOUNG CHARLES  
(trying to gather strength)  
Blood of iron, heart of ice.

50 INT. BEDROOM - MORNING (PRESENT)

50

Dickens is in bed, tossing in his sleep. Kate comes in,  
dressed for the day. Dickens awakes with a start.

KATE  
Good morning.

She bustles about the room.

DICKENS  
What? Oh. Yes.

KATE  
You were tossing and turning all  
night, you know.

DICKENS  
Bad dreams.

KATE  
What about?

He shakes his head.

DICKENS

I don't know. Shadows. Nothing more.

KATE

A little daylight will cure you.

She throws open the curtains.

51 INT/EXT. MARKET - DAY

51

A theatre curtain is pulled aside to reveal a puppet show, performing to a watching crowd in the COVERED market. All is bustle and colour.

Dickens wanders amongst the stalls overflowing with brightly coloured goods, tin pans, second-hand clothes, baskets of chestnuts, pears and apples, piles of filberts.

Suddenly, a figure is there, tugging on his sleeve. It's Scrooge.

SCROOGE

I trust we'll have no more of that.

Dickens is taken aback.

DICKENS

Of --?

SCROOGE

The past. A lot of nonsense. Onward.

Scrooge flinches as a couple of CHILDREN run screaming by them.

DICKENS

Were you never a child, Mr. Scrooge?

SCROOGE

I don't recall. Come on, we're wasting time. We should be working.

DICKENS

I am working.

SCROOGE

Here?

DICKENS

I'm gathering inspiration.

SCROOGE  
Gathering... what??

Dickens gestures.

DICKENS  
What do you see? When you look  
around?

SCROOGE  
A market.

DICKENS  
What else?

He points to various people in the market: A PIEMAN with his  
arms laden with pie cans, yelling:

PIEMAN  
Pies all'ot! Eel, beef, or mutton  
pies! Penny Pies, all' ot!

SCROOGE  
Buyers and sellers.

DICKENS  
What else?

A Cockney SCAM ARTIST, doing a patter.

SCAM ARTIST  
....Three thimbles and one little  
pea- with a one, two, three, and a  
two, three, one, catch him who can,  
look on, keep your eyes open and  
niver say die!

SCROOGE  
Thieves and ruffians.

As they step out from the "souk" into the open air street  
market, He points to A YOUNG COUPLE, lost in admiration of  
each other. A NEWSAGENT, calling out:

NEWSAGENT  
Times, gen'l'mn, Times! Highly  
Interesting murder, gen'l'mn,

A FIDDLER, plays a tune and a BUTCHER calls out.

BUTCHER  
Clear away! Clear away, lads!

He tosses the fiddler a coin, catches up his WIFE and starts to dance. Dickens laughs with pleasure, then looks at Scrooge, who shrugs.

DICKENS

Life, Mr. Scrooge! London! The great theatre of the world! It's all here!

SCROOGE

Humbug.

DICKENS

You say that a lot.

SCROOGE

I'm a man of facts and calculations. Realities, not fancy... Not-- not-- what the devil is that?--

Dickens and Scrooge stare at a strange sight: a PAPIER MACHE BOTTLE is toddling along the street. When the bottle reaches Dickens, a hand pops out of it, and thrusts a flyer in his hand: an advertisement for Warren's Blacking.

Dickens is frozen for a moment, unnerved. He takes off in the other direction.

DICKENS

Must go.

SCROOGE

Where to?

DICKENS

(over his shoulder)  
Back to work.

52

INT. DICKENS HOUSE. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

52

The family are at the dinner table waiting to eat. Mr. Dickens entertains the children, making them giggle.

MR. DICKENS

Papa... potatoes... poultry... and prunes... are all very good words for the lips.

At the other end of the table, Mrs. Dickens reminisces for Kate's benefit.

MRS. DICKENS

And oh, the parties.... We used to  
keep such hours! Balls, dinners—  
champagne—

Mr. Dickens ties his napkin around his head, winks at the  
children. The children giggle.

KATE

Well, it looks as if Charles won't be joining us this evening. Again. We may as well begin.

Mr. Dickens has already begun.

MR. DICKENS

First rate capon, Mrs. Fisk.

MRS. FISK

Thank you sir. I'll let the cook know.

MRS. DICKENS

...and the chairs had turned legs with green chintz squabs to match the curtains.

At that moment, Dickens appears in the doorway.

DICKENS

What story is that, Mother?

Mrs. Dickens reddens.

MRS. DICKENS

I was only telling Kate about the dining room set we used to have. Rosewood. In the most approved taste.

DICKENS

You mean, the one we pawned?

An awkward silence.

MRS. DICKENS

Charles. You are a satirical monster.

Kate is bewildered.

KATE

Is that a joke, dear?

DICKENS

Not a very amusing one.

Mrs. Dickens examines her hands, mortified. An awkward silence. Dickens turns a cold eye on his father.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Is that a new waistcoat father?



MR. DICKENS

Eh? What? Oh, yes. Persian crimson.  
It is a little more expensive, but  
I've always said, people will  
believe anything if you're properly  
dressed.

Beat.

DICKENS

Kate. Will you ask Tara to bring up  
a tray with something on it?

KATE

I'll bring it up.

DICKENS

No! I *need* Tara to do it.

MR. DICKENS

That's the spirit my boy.  
Procrastination is the thief of  
time, eh Charles. Collar him!

Dickens looks at him, but decides not to say anything.

MRS. FISK

I'll get her sir. Tara!

Mr. Dickens, unperturbed, digs into his food.

MR. DICKENS

We must never disturb the poet when  
the divine frenzy is upon him. I  
myself have suffered the same  
delirium. Often to the detriment of  
my health, as you know, my love.

53

INT. DICKENS STUDY - NIGHT

53

Dickens is talking to himself in the mirror, like a mad man.

DICKENS

Know the place! Was I apprenticed  
here? Why it's old Fezziwig!

Behind him, in the room, the FEZZIWIGS appear (the genial  
BUTCHER and his WIFE from the market). They start to dance.

FEZZIWIG

Clear away, lads! Clear away! It's  
Friday night!

There is a knock on the door. The Fezziwigs freeze.

DICKENS

Who is it?

TARA (O.S.)

It's Tara, sir. With your dinner.

Dickens throws open the door.

DICKENS

Tara. Come in. Come in.

He takes the tray from her.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Sit. I want to read you something.

TARA

Oh, I don't think Mrs. Fisk-

DICKENS

Skittleshins to Mrs. Fisk. Sit.  
Please.

She does.

54 INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT 54

Kate sits alone and bored. Another evening without the company of her husband. She looks at the ceiling. The study above her.

55 OMIT 55

56 INT. STUDY - NIGHT 56

Dickens is reading to Tara from the manuscript. She smiles lost in her imagination.

DICKENS

... in easy state upon this couch,  
there sat a jolly giant, who bore a  
glowing torch and held it up to  
shed its light on Scrooge as he  
came peeping round the corner.

TARA

The second ghost!

The lights in the room slowly brighten, revealing the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT (bearing a strong resemblance to Forster in a beard), seated high up on a throne, amidst a cornucopia of apples and oranges and pears, chestnuts, mistletoe and holly. Around him in a circle, various other CHARACTERS from the book, stare up in rapt attention.

The Ghost laughs as he sees Scrooge approach, shielding his eyes from the bright light.

SCROOGE

Who are you?

The ghost laughs.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I am the Ghost of Christmas present. Come closer man and know me better.

Scrooge fearfully climbs the library steps.

SCROOGE

Excuse me, but -- why all this-  
produce?

The Ghost laughs again.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

These are the gifts of abundance,  
of good will and generosity.

SCROOGE

Eh?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Of course you wouldn't understand  
much about that, would you? Unlike  
these good people.

The Ghost of Christmas Present points towards the hearth, where the CRATCHIT FAMILY including BOB (looking a good deal like Henry Burnett Sr.), and TINY TIM (a paler, more fragile version of Henry) are seated round a table, staring joyfully at a very modest Christmas dinner of mashed potatoes, apple sauce, gravy, and a very small roasted goose.

CRATCHIT

My dear Mrs. Cratchit. You have  
outdone yourself this year.

Mrs. Cratchit beams, and looks around at her children.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Everyone pitched in. Even Tim.

Tim points to the mismatched cups and plates.

TINY TIM

I set the table!

Cratchit lifts his glass.

CRATCHIT

A Merry Christmas to us all, my  
dears. And may God bless us.

TINY TIM

God bless us every one!

Tiny Tim's little body is racked with coughs. Cratchit picks  
him up in his arms.

Scrooge stares at Tiny Tim, moved.

SCROOGE

I didn't know Cratchit had a  
crippled son.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Didn't you ever think to ask?

SCROOGE

He's my clerk. I don't pay him to  
tell me about his personal life.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You hardly pay him at all.

SCROOGE

Fifteen shillings a week.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

For a man with a family? Not too  
mention a sick child.

SCROOGE

That is the market rate.

The ghost bristles.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Do you really believe that every  
inch of existence is a bargain  
across the counter?

SCROOGE

I-- I-

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Observe this family. They don't  
have much, and yet they're happy,  
grateful and contented with the  
time. Whereas you are miserable and  
content with nothing.

SCROOGE

I never heard such folly.

A clock in the room strikes the hour.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Heed well what I have said.  
Farewell.

SCROOGE

No. Wait-

DICKENS (O.S.)

Intermission.

The characters spontaneously applaud as Scrooge and the Ghost take a bow.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

Thrilling performance.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

That's very kind.

MR. FEZZIWIG

Where did you train?

A clock in the room strikes the hour. The lights start returning to normal. The characters disappear.

Dickens turns over the last page of the manuscript.

DICKENS

And that's as far as I've got.

Tara stirs herself, like one awaking from a sleep.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Tara?

She nods, still half in a dream, then turns back.

TARA

How do you do that, sir?

DICKENS

What, Tara?

TARA

Make a world, come alive.... I  
could almost see and hear them  
people.

She drifts out the door.

TARA (CONT'D)

Especially that Tiny Tim. The poor  
mite

Dickens pleased his writing has affected someone so much,  
turns to see Scrooge, jolting him out of his reverie.

SCROOGE

A word in your ear.

Dickens is wary.

DICKENS

About?

SCROOGE

The scene. It's very one-sided-

DICKENS

One-sided?

SCROOGE

My character doesn't get to explain  
his side of things. I've taken the  
liberty of writing a speech -

DICKENS

No.

SCROOGE

-- something about the rational  
self-interest and the natural  
tendency of free markets--

DICKENS

No. No. And no.

Scrooge scowls.

SCROOGE

What kind of book *is* this, anyway?

Dickens sweeps out of the room.

56A OMIT

56A

57 INT. LEECH'S STUDIO - DAY

57

Dickens and Forster study a sketch that Leech has done.

DICKENS

No! Too gloomy. The Ghost of Christmas Present should be wonderful. Warm. Jolly.

LEECH

Jolly.

DICKENS

Yes.

LEECH

A jolly ghost.

DICKENS

That's it.

Leech goes to a cabinet and counts out fifty pounds in cash.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

What's this?

LEECH

I am returning your money.

FORSTER

-My dear Mr. Leech-

LEECH

Find another artist.

DICKENS

We don't want another artist.

LEECH

A jolly Christmas ghost? What does that *mean*? I can't draw what I don't understand!

DICKENS

Well, he's - he's everything that's  
best about Christmas. He's the soul  
of kindness and generosity, he's-

He glances at Forster.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Forster.

FORSTER

Eh?

CUT TO:

58 INT. LEECH'S STUDIO - LATER

58

Forster, dressed in a sheet, open to his navel, and holding a lamp aloft, poses uncomfortably while Dickens applies makeup to his cheeks.

Leech waits to sketch him.

59 EXT. LONDON/HATCHARD'S - NIGHT

59

Dickens is stopped outside of Hatchard's. In the store window a sign advertises "A New Christmas Book by Mr. Dickens. Order Now and Avoid Disappointment." Dickens peers through the window lost in thought.

Suddenly, a POSSE of Characters from the book appears behind him, Scrooge amongst them, staring in at the window.

SCROOGE

(to Cratchit)

In stores by Christmas? That will  
be a miracle.

The posse sniggers.

DICKENS

Go away.

SCROOGE

Three flops in a row. Up to your  
eyeballs in debt. I'd think you'd  
be glad of some advice.

The POSSE nods in agreement.

DICKENS

All right. I've had a few flops,  
what of it? I'm still young. It's  
not as if I--



Suddenly the surrounding area falls into darkness as the gas lamps dim one by one. Scrooge turns pale as shadows take over the street. Dickens turns to see the POSSE and SCROOGE staring at a dark STATUE across the road.

Slowly the statue comes to life, its robes float eerily in the wind, giving form to a terrifying Phantom, its face obscured by a hood. (The GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET-TO-COME). Dickens and Scrooge exchange fearful looks.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Are we in the presence of the Ghost  
of Christmas Yet to Come?

The Spirit nods.

SCROOGE

(to Dickens)  
Why doesn't he speak?

DICKENS

Shhh.  
(to Ghost)  
You are here to show us the shadows  
of the things that have not  
happened but will happen, is that  
so?

The Spirit slowly raises a shrouded arm and points down the street, the giant shadow of its finger comes to a stop at a small door.

SCROOGE

(whispering to Dickens)  
Where does it want us to go?

DICKENS

I think I know.

With that he heads towards the door, SCROOGE and the POSSE following.

SCROOGE

I have a bad feeling about this.

DICKENS (O.S.)

They entered poor Bob Cratchit's  
house and found the mother and the  
children seated round the fire.

Mrs. Cratchit and the children, dressed in black, huddle together by the fire. Tiny Tim is not among them. We see his lonely crutch leaning against the fireplace.

DICKENS (V.O.)

Then Bob came in the door.

MRS. CRATCHIT

You went today, then Robert? To the cemetery?

Cratchit struggles to be cheerful as he enters the room.

CRATCHIT

Yes, my dear. I wish you could have gone to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday.

He smiles through his tears.

CRATCHIT (CONT'D)

My little child. My little, little child!

His voice cracks and he covers his eyes.

TARA

Oh no!

The characters freeze. Scrooge shoots a look over his shoulder, TO REVEAL THE SCENE IS TAKING PLACE IN DICKENS STUDY

SCROOGE

Rude!

Tara has been listening to the story, her eyes wide with emotion.

TARA

Is Tiny Tim dead?

SCROOGE

Of course he is. Imbecile.

DICKENS

(gently)  
He was very ill.

SCROOGE

You can't save every child in London.

DICKENS

And the family has no money for a doctor.

Tara is becoming upset.

TARA

Then Scrooge must save him.

Scrooge is taken aback.

SCROOGE

Me?

Dickens looks from one to the other.

DICKENS

But he wouldn't-

TARA

Why?

DICKENS

He's too selfish.

TARA

He can change. There's good in him somewhere, I know it.

Scrooge rolls his eyes.

SCROOGE

People don't change.

DICKENS

He's been this way for a long time. I'm not sure he can change.

TARA

Of course he can. He's not a monster.

DICKENS

I don't - he isn't -

SCROOGE

Thought this was a ghost story. Not a fairy tale.

TARA

He wouldn't let Tiny Tim die, Mr. Dickens. He has a heart, doesn't he? It would be too wicked. Even for him.

Dickens stares at them a moment, now plagued with doubt.

FLASHBACK

60A INT. WARREN'S BLACKING - CONTINUOUS

60A

Inside the noisy, squalid factory, Young Charles is led by a Foreman to a score of pale-faced, miserable-looking CHILDREN, all of them busy pasting labels on bottles or packing them in casks.

FOREMAN

Boys. This here is Charlie Dickens.  
And what was it you was just  
telling me, lad? About your Dad?

Young Charles draws himself up proudly.

YOUNG CHARLES

My father is a gentleman.

The boys jeer. Young Charles flushes with embarrassment.

One of the boys, POLL, calls out.

POLL

Where is he, then? Dining with the  
queen?

Another boy calls out.

BOY

I 'eard he's in the stone jug.

FOREMAN

Hush, you lot. Where's your  
manners?

The Foreman addresses him with elaborate politeness.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Master Dickens. Perhaps you would  
be so good as to join us at work?  
If you've nothing better to do?

The Foreman thrusts him down hard onto the work bench. Young Charles looks around, miserable, at his surroundings.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

No shirking here.

A rat scuttles nearby, to reveal a sheer drop to the giant blacking VATS below. Poll sits down beside him and hisses at him.

POLL

You're no better than me, cocker.  
You'd best learn that.

BACK TO

61 INT. DICKEN STUDY - NIGHT

61

Dickens sits at his desk. He looks at the clock. It's the middle of the night. He once again goes through his ritual of straightening everything on his desk.

He tidies his manuscript, picks up his pen, dips it in ink, then stares at the paper.

There is a racket in the hallway outside the door.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)

'Tis now the very witching time of  
night,

MRS. DICKENS (O.S.)

Shhh, dear.

Mr. and Mrs. Dickens are in the hallway outside the door.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)

When churchyards yawn and hell  
itself breathes out—

Scrooge appears.

SCROOGE

Shakespeare. Now there's a man who  
could write. I doubt he ever had a  
blockage.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)

Now could I drink hot blood!

Dickens grips his hair in frustration.

SCROOGE

(egging dickens on)

Self-preservation is the first law  
of nature. That's just a fact.

Dickens throws open the door to find Mr. Dickens, drunkenly negotiating the stairs with the help of Mrs. Dickens.

MRS. DICKENS

That's right dear. Just a few more  
steps.

MR. DICKENS

"Oh, heart lose not thy nature; let  
not ever  
the soul of Nero--

Mr. Dickens sees Charles and attempts to regain his posture.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)

Oh. Good evening, Charles.

Mrs. Dickens is a little afraid of her son.

MRS. DICKENS

We'll get him straight into bed, Charles, dear. We were up the river to Kew and I think perhaps it was too long a day.

DICKENS

Kew! What about your newspaper article?

MR. DICKENS

Article?

DICKENS

The one you're writing on the Bank Charter Act? It's been over a month.

Mr. Dickens shifts, uncomfortably.

MR. DICKENS

Oh, that. As it happens, the editor was not able to— that is to say— due to pecuniary involvements of a complicated nature— he found it necessary to— to cancel the commission.

DICKENS

So. No newspaper article.

MR. DICKENS

However, I rejoice to say that I have every hope of something turning up —

Dickens sees Scrooge hovering behind him, scowling.

DICKENS

I think it's time you went back to Devon, Father.

Beat.

MR. DICKENS

Indeed.

DICKENS

As soon as possible.

MR. DICKENS

Of course, dear boy. We shall catch the afternoon train tomorrow.



He stumbles and nearly falls, but is caught by Tara.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)  
(with dignity)  
Thank you, my dear. Here--

He fumbles in his pocket for a coin.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)  
Let me give you something for your  
trouble.

TARA  
That's all right, sir.

MR. DICKENS  
You're very kind.

They move away.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)  
(to Tara)  
No-one is useless in this world who  
lightens the burden of another.  
Remember that, Tara.

TARA  
I will, sir.

Mrs. Dickens gives Dickens a reproachful look.

MRS. DICKENS  
Don't be hard on him, Charlie. You  
don't know what he's been through.

DICKENS  
Don't I?

MRS. DICKENS  
He feels it all, you know. He would  
never tell you, but he feels it  
all.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)  
Ride on! Ride on over all obstacles  
and win the race!

Dickens turns back to his study. Scrooge is smug.

SCROOGE  
That's it. Blood of iron, heart of  
ice. Now maybe we can finish this  
thing.

Off Dickens his face. Lost.

CUT TO:

62	OMIT	62
63	OMIT	63
64	OMIT	64
65	INT. STUDY - DAY	65

Dickens sits at his desk, staring straight ahead.

In the room, the characters (including Cratchit, Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig), lounge around, like actors on a break. Some knitting or doing the crossword. Dickens picks up a pen, and the characters look up hopefully.

DICKENS

All right, let's run it again. From  
the scene with Scrooge's debtors.

The characters groan. Scrooge, lying on the chaise, looks over with disdain.

SCROOGE  
What's the point?

DICKENS  
The point?

SCROOGE  
We keep stopping at the same place.

DICKENS  
Because I'm working out the ending.

SCROOGE  
Admit it. You're blocked.

DICKENS  
I'm not blocked.

SCROOGE  
Now if you'd take my advice--

DICKENS  
I am the author here.

SCROOGE  
(mutters)  
Allegedly.

Beat.

DICKENS  
I'm going out.

All the characters get to their feet.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
Alone!

The characters fall back, silent.

66

INT. GARRICK CLUB - DAY

66

Dickens finds Forster at a table, scribbling in a notebook.

DICKENS  
Forster. I need your help.

Forster grabs his coat in alarm.

FORSTER  
What is it? The children?

DICKENS

What? No. The children are fine.

Forster sits back down. Dickens glances at the notebook Forster has been writing in.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Candle/scandal... flirt/hurt...  
Charlotte/Poor heart. My God, is it  
a poem? It's atrocious. What's got  
into you?

Forster rushes to snatch the paper away.

FORSTER

You look terrible. Is something  
wrong?

DICKENS

It's the book. I'm having trouble  
with one of the characters.

He looks out the window again where the entire CAST OF  
CHARACTERS from the book are standing, looking up at him.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Several of them, actually.

FORSTER

What exactly is the problem?

Dickens picks away at Forster's dinner.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

The problem is, could a man as mean-  
spirited, as evil as Scrooge— could  
he become a different person  
overnight?

FORSTER

What is so evil about him?

DICKENS

Well, he's a miser.

FORSTER

That doesn't make him evil. It just  
makes him cheap.

DICKENS

No, but he worships money. It's the  
only thing that matters to him.

FORSTER

Why?

DICKENS

Because... he has nothing else.

FORSTER

No friends? No family?

DICKENS

No-one he trusts.

FORSTER

Why?

DICKENS

I suppose he's afraid-

FORSTER

Of?

Dickens struggles to answer.

DICKENS

Of- being found out.

FORSTER

What?

THACKERAY (O.S.)

Hullo, chaps.

Thackeray appears at the table.

FORSTER

Thackeray.

THACKERAY

Charles! Haven't seen anything of yours in print for ages. Don't tell me you have a blockage!

DICKENS

Not in the least. I'm neck and heels into a Christmas book!

Thackeray is flummoxed.

THACKERAY

What the deuce is that?

DICKENS

A story about Christmas. For Christmas.

THACKERAY

A story about-? Ha ha! How amusing... Well.

(MORE)

THACKERAY (CONT'D)

Best of luck with it! Oh! Did you hear? My last book has come out in a Railway edition. Sold ten thousand copies. In one week! "There's gold in them thar hills" as your American friends would say.

He wafts away. Dickens and Forster exchange looks.

FORSTER

Let's go somewhere else and get a real drink.

67

EXT. THE GREEN HOG - NIGHT

67

Forster and Dickens stumble out of a bar, laughing. Forster sings, in a thick North Country accent—

FORSTER

"She's a big lass, she's a bonny lass, an she likes her beer  
An I call her Cushie Butterfield an I wish she was here."

DICKENS

What language is that?

FORSTER

I am a Geordie! And we are Gods!

Dickens gapes around him in confusion.

DICKENS

Where are we?

FORSTER

Hungerford Stairs. Phew. Smell the river? What's that?

Dickens recoils at the sight of the Warren's Blacking Factory looming out of the swirling fog.

DICKENS

(bitterly)  
A grave yard.

FORSTER

It's the old Warren's Factory. I wonder they haven't torn it down yet.

DICKENS

Or burnt it. I might do it myself one night.

FORSTER

Why? What have you got against boot  
blacking?

Forster looks at a pale and sweaty Dickens.

FORSTER (CONT'D)

Charles? What is it?

Dickens looks at Forster, a strange expression on his face.

DICKENS

I -- I have this recurring  
nightmare.

FORSTER

Oh, nightmares. I have one where  
I'm being chased by a giant badger.  
What's yours?

Beat.

DICKENS

Never mind.

FORSTER

Right. Time to go home.

DICKENS

I can't.

FORSTER

Why?

Dickens is becoming emotional.

DICKENS

The book - I can't -- The  
characters - won't do what I want.  
... I'm afraid.

FORSTER

Of what?

DICKENS

That if I don't finish it, I'll  
never write again.

FORSTER

Go home, marra. Get some sleep.

DICKENS

I don't want to.

FORSTER

Don't be daft. Your wife will be worried sick.

DICKENS

My wife- doesn't understand me-

Forster puts his arm heavily on his friend's shoulder.

FORSTER

I've got news for you, marra. None of us understand you! You're a freak of nature. I'm exhausted spending two hours in your company. ...Go on home, now. It's cowl'd, the night. Go home. I'll see you in the morning.

He leaves. Dickens stares at the building. He takes a few drunken steps towards it, then turns and flees.

68

EXT. DICKENS HOUSE - NIGHT

68

Dickens goes to let himself in the front door. He glances down and sees someone rooting through the dust bin. Dickens rushes down to the vagrant who is going through his rubbish.

DICKENS

Here, you, what are you up to?

The man turns around.

MR. DICKENS

Hello, Charlie.

His father.

DICKENS

Father? What are you doing here?

MR. DICKENS

I - I had some business to attend to, so I thought I'd-

DICKENS

You just left town! What business could you possibly have-

Dickens notices the piece of paper in his hands and grabs it. It's a letter with his own signature on it, crumpled and discarded.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

What were you going to do with that?



His father looks sheepish.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
You were going to sell it, weren't you?

MR. DICKENS  
It's no good to you, is it?

DICKENS  
This is what you've been doing? Going through the rubbish like a tramp? Selling bits and pieces of me. Is that your business? Look at me. Aren't you ashamed?

Mr. Dickens doesn't respond.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
I bought you a house and furnished it myself. I give you an allowance. What more could you possibly need?

MR. DICKENS  
Oh, reason not the need!

His voice rises.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)  
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man—

DICKENS  
No. Stop.

Mr. Dickens can't look his son in the eye.

MR. DICKENS  
You don't know what it's like, Charlie. To be poor. To be nothing.

Dickens fury is incandescent—

DICKENS  
Not know? Not know? At eleven years old I was made to know it— Working twelve hours a day, going hungry, wandering the streets all alone and afraid—

Mr. Dickens attempts to respond, but is cut off by Dickens.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
Because your father— who is  
supposed to care for you— is so  
utterly thriftless--

Mr. Dickens weeps.

MR. DICKENS  
Dear boy. Don't— I beg you.

DICKENS  
No. You are not the victim here.  
This is about me. And Fanny. It's  
about all of us. We've lived our  
whole lives in the shadow of your  
recklessness.

Dickens stares at his father, weeping in the street.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
Go away. I'm sickened at the sight  
of you. You are nothing but a drag  
and chain upon my life. I owe you  
nothing. Go.

Dickens goes in the house and shuts the door firmly behind  
him. Then leans against it, breathing heavily.

69 INT. PARLOUR - NEXT DAY

69

Forster, is listening while Dickens reads the manuscript  
aloud.

DICKENS  
"...Are these the shadows of the  
things that Will be, or are they  
shadows of the things that May be  
only?"

He looks up.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
And that's as far as I got.

Beat.

FORSTER  
It's brilliant.

DICKENS  
Are you pulling my leg?

FORSTER  
No. I promise you.

DICKENS

Well... that's... encouraging—

FORSTER

My only criticism—

Forster stops himself.

DICKENS

Yes?

FORSTER

—Tiny Tim—

Dickens stares at him.

DICKENS

What about him?

FORSTER

Are you really going to let him die?

DICKENS

Why? What's the problem?

FORSTER

Well, it's a Christmas book. Shouldn't it be hopeful? Isn't that what Christmas is about? The hope that, in the end, our better natures will prevail?

Beat.

DICKENS

You were the one who made me kill off Little Nell.

FORSTER

I stand by that decision.

DICKENS

My readers implored me—

FORSTER

But this is different. If Tiny Tim dies, then what's the point?

DICKENS

This isn't a fairy tale.

FORSTER

As mean as Scrooge is, he still has a heart. Doesn't he deserve a second chance?

Beat.

DICKENS

Thank you, Forster—

FORSTER

You're welcome—

DICKENS

—for reminding me why I never ask your opinion on my work.

FORSTER

You ask me for my opinion all the time.

DICKENS

Your services are no longer required.

FORSTER

You can't sack me.

DICKENS

Why?

FORSTER

Because — I don't work for you. I do what I do as a friend.

DICKENS

Good day, Mr. Forster.

Forster gets to his feet, heavily.

FORSTER

Right...

(turning back)

See you Friday, will I?

70

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

70

The characters have taken over every inch of it. Cratchit and The Pieman, are drinking tea by the window. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig are playing cards. There's an atmosphere of gloom.

A CHARWOMAN sits by the fire with her feet up on the hob. As Dickens enters the room she glances over at him with mild interest.

CHARWOMAN

Who's that, then?

Scrooge, dozing on the sofa, opens an eye.

SCROOGE  
Nobody. The author.

CHARWOMAN  
No wonder he looks so depressed.

Dickens picks up the manuscript and flips through it.

DICKENS  
All right. That's enough. Let's get  
back to work.

SCROOGE  
(to Cratchit)  
God bless us, everyone...

They titter together like children.

DICKENS  
Why are you so miserable?

SCROOGE  
What else can I be, when I live in  
such a world of fools as this.

DICKENS  
Mean-spirited, cynical -

SCROOGE  
Take a look in the mirror sometime.

DICKENS  
Me?

SCROOGE  
"Is that a new candle, Kate?" "Your  
services are no longer required."  
"I'm sickened at the sight of you."  
Hypocrite.

A knock at the door stops him from replying. Dickens throws  
it open, furious. Tara is there with a cup of cocoa.

TARA  
Pardon me, sir. Mrs. Dickens sent  
me -

DICKENS  
This is intolerable.

Dickens calls down the hall.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
Mrs. Fisk?

Mrs. Fisk appears.

MRS. FISK

Yes, sir?

DICKENS

Take this child away from here and see that she doesn't disturb me ever again. Do you hear me?

MRS. FISK

Yes, sir. Come on, girl.

Tara is mortified. Head down, she scurries down the stairs.

Back in the room, Scrooge raises his arms above his head in triumph.

SCROOGE

Yes! Banish her! Banish them all!

DICKENS

Be quiet--

SCROOGE

Humanity's great benefactor?  
Humbug!

DICKENS

Shut it. Or I'll make you bald.  
With bad teeth.

SCROOGE

Go ahead. It won't change a thing.  
You still won't have an ending.

Scrooge crosses his arms defiantly. He looks at the others: they follow suit.

DICKENS

This is ridiculous. You're all  
being ridiculous.

They continue to stare him down.

In a sudden movement, Dickens picks up the glass inkwell and throws it at the fireplace, where it shatters.

The room instantly empties of characters.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Come on then. Coward. Fight me.  
Fight me. Come out. If you be a  
man. Come out and fight!

71 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT 71

Kate stares at the ceiling, as Dickens rails away in the study.

DICKENS (O.S.)  
Come out. If you be a man. Come out  
and fight!

She is clearly disturbed.

72 INT. DICKENS STUDY - MORNING 72

Dickens wakes with a start and looks around. The room is a disaster. Papers everywhere. Ink staining the wall.

His glance falls on the Penny Dreadful that Tara left behind, with its lurid cover of Varney the Vampire. He stares at it a moment.

DICKENS  
Tara!

He goes to the door and bellows down the stairs.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
Tara!

73 INT. DICKENS HOUSE. DINING ROOM - MORNING 73

The children are at breakfast with Kate. Mrs Fisk is there too. The mood is sombre. Dickens appears, his clothes awry, full of an edgy energy.

DICKENS  
Whatever is the matter?

CHARLEY  
Tara.

Charley bursts into tears.

DICKENS  
What about her?

CHARLEY  
She's gone.

DICKENS  
On whose authority?



KATE

You asked Mrs. Fisk to take her  
away.

DICKENS

(to Mrs Fisk)

Then go and search for her. Rehire  
her at once.

MRS. FISK

An Irish orphan in London? It would  
be like trying to find a needle in  
a haystack.

Dickens eyes blaze. He turns on Kate.

DICKENS  
Why didn't you stop her?

KATE  
How was I to know you didn't mean  
it? You said-

DICKENS  
I say a lot of things that are  
nonsense. It's what happens when  
I'm working.

KATE  
Charles.

DICKENS  
You knew, when you married me, what  
I was like: how ideas take  
possession of me.

KATE  
I did. But you don't know what it's  
like to live with you, always  
walking on eggshells, trying to  
guess your mood, to know which of  
your commands is a whim and which  
is in earnest. Sometimes I think  
your characters matter more to you  
than your own flesh and blood.

DICKENS  
I am who I am.

KATE  
And who is that? It's as if there  
are two of you, Charles. One that  
is good and kind, and a secret  
self, that no-one is allowed to  
know or question.

Dickens stares at her a moment, then storms out of the room.

73A INT. STUDY - DAY

73A

Dickens, heads back into the study, distraught. He catches  
himself in the mirror. We hear sounds of squealing rats,  
quietly as first, but as they build up...

74 OMIT

74

75 OMIT

75

76 OMIT

76

77	OMIT	77
78	OMIT	78
79	OMIT	79
80	OMIT	80
81	OMIT	81
82	OMIT	82

## FLASHBACK:

83	INT. WARREN'S BLACKING FACTORY - DAY	83
----	--------------------------------------	----

Young Charles is sitting at his bench, looking frail. His clothes are torn and dirty. His eyes are hollow. A ragged cough shakes his body.

Young Charles chants to himself, to keep from crying.

YOUNG CHARLES

Blood of iron, heart of ice. Blood  
of iron, heart of ice. ...

POLL (O.S.)

Got a present for the young  
gent'lmun. Seeing as it's  
Christmas.

Young Charles, open his eyes to see one of the older boys, POLL, approaching, hands behind his back. In a sudden movement, he flings a DEAD RAT at him.

The other boys laugh.

With a howl of rage, Young Charles launches himself at Poll. But Poll easily pushes him away.

POLL (CONT'D)

You're no better than me, cocker,  
and you know it.

The other boys gather round to cheer as Poll commences pummelling Young Charles.

BACK TO:

83A INT STUDY - DAY

83A

Dickens picks up the manuscript, then tosses it into the wastebasket in disgust.

Then abruptly storms out of the room, off to confront his demons.

84 OMIT

84

85 EXT. WARRENS BLACKING FACTORY

85

Dickens stands outside decrepit Warren's Blacking Factory. Slowly, fearfully, he pulls a board off a door and peers inside.

86 INT. WARREN'S BLACKING FACTORY - NIGHT

86

Dickens walks through the dusty, abandoned warehouse, remembering.

In his imagination, he hears the SOUNDS of SQUEAKING RATS. Of boys LAUGHING.

In the basement, he finds a low bench beneath the window on which are a few dusty POTS OF SHOE-BLACKING.

Scrooge materializes behind him holding a lamp.

SCROOGE

'ello, Charlie.

Dickens turns to see him.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

So. This is your miserable secret. The famous author, the inimitable Charles Dickens, was once a scabby little factory boy.

DICKENS

Leave me be.

SCROOGE

A common bit of riffraff, living on scraps, a squalid wretch of no worth to anyone—

Dickens lunges at Scrooge, grabbing at thin air, he falls to the ground, his face reflected across a broken mirror lying on the floor. Scrooge looms over Dickens.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Look! What do you see there? Hmm? A  
nothing. A nobody. A debtor's son.  
Who could ever care for you?  
Certainly not your father. He  
abandoned you.

Dickens struggles to his feet, putting distance between him  
and Scrooge.

DICKENS

He didn't -- he -- It wasn't his  
fault.

A rotten railing blocking his path. Dickens looks down at a  
sheer drop into a huge empty blacking vat below. The railing  
gives way, the squeal of a thousand rats disturbed by the  
falling woodwork.

SCROOGE

He failed you. Again and again. You  
said it yourself. Nothing but a  
drag and chain upon your life.

Dickens turn to look at the fall below. Dickens looks at  
Scrooge in horror.

DICKENS

*Who are you?*

Scrooge advances on him, holding his lamp high, forcing Dickens to back up against the sheer drop.

SCROOGE

You know me, Charlie. I'm hunger.  
I'm cold. I'm darkness.... I'm the  
shadow on your thoughts, the crack  
in your heart, the stain on your  
soul... And I will never leave you.

Dickens holds up his hands as if to block Scrooge's words.

DICKENS

Go away.

SCROOGE

But we're having such fun. (beat)  
People don't change, Charlie.

DICKENS

They can. They do.

SCROOGE

Lies. Look around. You're still  
that scabby boy. No use to anyone.  
Just like your father.

DICKENS

(enraged)

No...

Dickens take a sharp breath in. His eyes blaze.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

"No one is useless in this world  
who lightens the burden of  
another."

SCROOGE

Eh?

DICKENS

(emboldened)

My father taught me that.

Scrooge turns to see an empty grave, with a blank HEADSTONE  
in the middle of the warehouse floor. Scrooge nervously edges  
towards it.

SCROOGE

(confused)

Whose grave it that? There's no  
name on the headstone.

DICKENS

Why should there be? The man to  
whom this grave belongs never made  
himself useful to anyone but  
himself. No friends. No family.  
Never felt love, or joy, or took  
any kind of pleasure in life...  
It's time. Mr. Scrooge. We've come  
to the end--

Scrooge unnerved, turns back to Dickens only to see an earth  
wall where Dickens was stood.

Turning again and then again he realizes he is surrounded by  
earth walls. Looking up he sees the blank headstone. He  
realizes he is now inside the empty grave. Dickens appears  
above, framed by the blacking factory ceiling.

Suddenly the walls of the grave start closing in on Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Please. - I- don't want to die like  
this, alone, unloved, forgotten.

DICKENS

Too late.



SCROOGE

Never too late! Oh, never too late.  
Please. I'll change.

The grave walls keep closing.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

-- I will honour Christmas in my  
heart, and try to keep it all the  
year. I will live in the Past, the  
Present and the Future. I will not  
shut out the lessons that they  
teach.

He looks directly at Dickens, imploring him.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Give me another chance. I beg you.  
*Let me do some good before I die.*

The walls stop closing, a beat, then they start opening.  
Scrooge is delighted, laughing, crying as the walls pull  
back. He smiles, genuinely transformed. Dickens smiles back.

DICKENS

And so we come to the last chapter.

Somewhere, a church bell CHIMES twelve o'clock. Dickens looks  
around, shocked to discover that the warehouse is empty and  
he is all alone. He lets out a sharp breath.

87 OMIT 87

88 INT. DICKENS STUDY - NIGHT 88

He enters taking a deep, steadying breath, then goes over to  
his desk and pulls out a new sheet of paper. He writes:  
"Stave Five: The End of It."

89 INT. DICKENS STUDY - EARLY MORNING 89

Early morning light filters in through the windows as Dickens  
bends over his writing, his pen SCRATCHING AWAY:

DICKENS (V.O.)

Scrooge was better than his word.  
He did it all and infinitely more;  
and to Tiny Tim who did not die, he  
was a second father. And so, as  
Tiny Tim observed, God bless us  
every one!... The End.

Dickens bundles up the manuscript and rushes downstairs.

90 EXT/INT. DICKENS HOUSE - MORNING 90

Dickens rushes to the front door, manuscript in hand. Kate appears in the doorway.

KATE

Charles? There's someone here to see you.

DICKENS

Not now, Kate. I have to get this to the printers before nine o'clock-

91 OMIT 91

92 OMIT 92

93 OMIT 93

94 OMIT 94

95 INT. PARLOUR - DAY 95

Tara is laughing and playing with the children.

DICKENS

Tara? How did you --

TARA

It were Mr. Dickens sir. He heard you were looking for me.

Dickens looks at Kate.

KATE

Your father makes it his business to know things about people.

Tara hands him back his book, Aladdin.

TARA

Thank you for the loan.

DICKENS

Did you like it?

Tara brightens.

TARA

Oh, yes, sir. It was fizzing.

This delights Dickens.

DICKENS

Fizzing! Delightful. You must read  
Robinson Crusoe next.

Tara looks at him, in surprise.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Tara. I'm sorry for sending you  
away. It was a mistake. Will you  
stay?

Tara nods, moved. Dickens smiles.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

And by the way, you were right  
about Tiny Tim. He doesn't die.  
Scrooge helps him to get better.

TARA

Of course. And doesn't he help  
Scrooge get better, too?

DICKENS

He does. He does, indeed.

Dickens looks at the mantelpiece, where a magic lantern is  
sitting.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

Where did that come from?

KATE

A gift. For the children. From your  
father.

DICKENS

He was here?

KATE

You can still catch him if--

Dickens hesitates, then stuffs the manuscript into his jacket  
as he rushes towards the door, turns around abruptly, grabs  
Kate and kisses her.

DICKENS

Kate--

KATE

I know, you don't deserve me. Go.

He rushes out of the house.

96 EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY 96

Outside the station, Dickens' cab pulls up. He jumps out and dashes past an enterprising VENDOR who is attempting to interest the passersby in his selection of "Christmas trees".

VENDOR

...the very latest, the same as what's in the Queen's own drawing room...

97 INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY 97

Dickens enters the station and sees his father and mother on the platform about to get on the train. He leaps over the barrier and runs towards them.

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)

Last call. All aboard.

DICKENS

Stop!

A CONSTABLE sees him and blows his whistle.

CONSTABLE

Stop!

Mr. and Mrs. Dickens, just getting on the train, turn to see their son running along the platform.

DICKENS

What do you think you are doing?

MRS. DICKENS

Please, dear. Don't make a scene. We're going away.

DICKENS

Oh, no you don't.

CONSTABLE

Hi! You!

Mr. Dickens sees the Constable, rushing to catch up to them.

MR. DICKENS

What have I done?

DICKENS

Done? It's what you haven't done.

Mrs. Dickens flinches.

MR. DICKENS

I don't understand—

Dickens laughs, a touch maniacally.

DICKENS

Who is going to carve the turkey?

(to his mother)

Who is going to make the Christmas pudding? It won't be the same without you?

Mrs. Dickens softens.

MRS. DICKENS

Oh, the pudding. The secret is to warm the treacle first.

Mr. Dickens turns to his wife.

MR. DICKENS

There you see, my dear? I told you something would turn up.

MRS. DICKENS

(through tears)

You did, you did.

Dickens laughs again, joyfully. He embraces them warmly.

The Constable has finally caught up with them. His eyes widen in astonishment.

CONSTABLE

You're that Charles Dickens.

DICKENS

Guilty.

CONSTABLE

I'm a huge fan.

DICKENS

Thank you.

CONSTABLE

That last one. Chuzzlewit. Wept like a baby, I did.

DICKENS

Well, that's very— What is your name, Constable?

CONSTABLE

My name? Copperfield, Sir.

Dickens whips out his notebook of names.

DICKENS  
Copperfield? Interesting.

CONSTABLE  
Any chance of a new book soon?

DICKENS  
Eh?

Dickens suddenly pats his coat, remembering the Christmas Carol manuscript stuffed in his jacket. He pulls it out and rushes for a cab.

97A EXT TRAIN STATION - DAY 97A

Manuscript in hand , Dickens runs out of the train station, jumps in a cab.

DICKENS  
Shoe Lane. And hurry.

97B EXT PRINTERS - DAY 97B

Dickens arrives at the printer, just as the clock is striking ten. Forster is waiting for him on the street.

FORSTER  
Charles. Where have you been? I've been waiting here for an hour.

DICKENS  
It's all right. I have the manuscript.

He pulls it out of his coat pocket. Several pages go flying in the wind.

DICKENS (CONT'D)  
No!

Forster and Dickens go chasing after the pages. A couple of PASSERSBY stop to help.

97C INT. PRINTERS - DAY 97C

Forster and Dickens run through the halls, past the noisy press room, past the bookbinding room, to the Composing room.

A cranky, ink-stained compositor (MR. GRUB) is just setting up when the two men arrive, out of breath, with the manuscript.

FORSTER

Mr. Grub! We're here.

The compositor starts and drops a line of type on the floor.

DICKENS

I have the ending! You can finish it now.

MR GRUB

It's too late.

FORSTER

Come on. You've already printed the other four chapters. It's just one more. Please.

Grub struggles with this.

MR GRUB

I can't guarantee anything.

DICKENS

Thank you. Thank you!

MR GRUB

(sourly)

I didn't say I could do it.

97D

INT. GARRICK CLUB - DAY

97D

Dickens waits nervously. He straightens at the sight of Forster, making his way through the crowded room. Finally, he arrives at the table.

DICKENS

Well? For God's sake man, don't prolong the agony.

Forster pulls out a package, wrapped in gold paper and tied with a bright red ribbon and hands it to Dickens.

Dickens opens it carefully. Inside is the book. The cover is red, the title stamped in gold: A Christmas Carol, By Charles Dickens. Dickens handles it with awe, turning the pages slowly.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

It's exactly as I'd imagined it.

THACKERAY (O.S.)

Hello, gents. Extraordinary weather, isn't it? Looks like snow.



Dickens  
Thackeray.

Thackeray holds up a galley copy of the Christmas Carol.

THACKERAY  
What's this I have? Why, it's your  
new book. I'm going to review it  
for this evening's Spectator. I'm  
told you wrote it in only six  
weeks, Charles? What a prodigy you  
are!

Thackeray throws himself into a nearby armchair, opening the  
book with a flourish.

Dickens and Forster exchange looks.

98 INT. DICKENS HOUSE/PARLOUR - NIGHT

98

Through the parlour windows we see the first Christmas  
snowfall. The gleaming new chandelier takes pride of place  
next to a Christmas tree as a splendid party is underway.

Fanny, Henry Sr. and Junior are there, watching as Mr.  
Dickens, dressed as a conjuror, does some magic tricks for  
Tara and the children. Mrs. Dickens chatters away to an  
uncomprehending Signor Mazzini. Mrs. Fisk has been into the  
punch.

MRS. FISK  
(humming to herself....)

Kate appears.

KATE  
Good heavens, what is that?

DICKENS  
The Germans call it a Tannenbaum.  
Now that the royal family has one,  
it's going to be all the rage.

Grip, the raven, flies onto a branch and eyes Mrs. Fisk.

GRIP  
Halloa, old girl. Halloa.

Forster arrives, a blushing Charlotte in tow.

KATE

Miss Wigmore!

Charlotte holds up her hand to show off her engagement ring.

CHARLOTTE

Papa had a change of heart.

Forster brandishes a newspaper.

FORSTER

Charles, I think you'll want to hear this. It's by Thackeray.

DICKENS

Not now please, Forster...

FORSTER

(ignoring charles)

"It was a blessed inspiration that put such a book into the head of Charles Dickens...a happy inspiration of the heart, that warms every page. It is impossible to read without a glowing bosom and burning cheeks, between love and shame of our kind...."

The group applauds. Smiling, Dickens holds up a glass of punch:

DICKENS

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

He smiles at Kate.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

...and those on the way. A toast: I wish you all many merry Christmases, friendships, great accumulation of cheerful recollections and heaven at last for all of us.

At that moment, Grip sees an opportunity and flies up the staircase towards Dickens' study. We follow him...

GRIP lands on the desk, revealing a happy Scrooge and the POSSE flicking through the newly printed book, giggling at the Leech print of the Fezziwigs.

DICKENS (V.O.)

In the season of hope, we will shut  
out nothing from our firesides and  
everyone will be welcome.

Taking off once again GRIP flies through the open window and  
out over the chimney tops of London...

100

EXT. HATCHARD'S BOOKSTORE - NIGHT

100

... Grip lands on the Hatchard's sign.

DICKENS (V.O.)

Welcome what has been and what is,  
and what we hope may be, to this  
shelter underneath the holly.  
Happy, happy Christmas to one and  
all.

Below, a line-up of people trail down the street and around  
the corner, waiting to purchase their copy of The Carol. We  
move up and up to reveal the wide snow filled streets of a  
beautiful bustling Dickensian Christmas world.

FADE OUT.

THE END