

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

by Sandra Nordgren



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A CHRISTMAS CAROL
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A Christmas Carol

Adaptation by Sandra Nordgren

SYNOPSIS: In this unusually funny and dramatic adaptation of Charles Dickens's classic Christmas tale, comedic ghosts teach Scrooge that there is more to life than running a business and making money. Through the lessons that they teach, Scrooge is brought back to his humanity and realizes that the most important thing in this world is loving and caring for people.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3-6 females, 6 males, 0-4 either, 1 extra; doubling possible, gender flexible)

- TINY TIM (m).....5 – 8; He is optimism incarnate. Believes, with all the innocence of a child, that God will answer everyone's prayers and make him well. *(5 lines)*
- EBENEZER SCROOGE (m).....45+; Crotchety miser hiding his misery, even from himself, in his obsession with money. Underneath that hard exterior is a man full of pain. Vulnerable, tender at heart, but grown coarse from the loss of love. He is internal, guarded, and afraid to let anyone touch that raw spot inside. *(99 lines)*
- BOB CRATCHIT (m).....30's; Employee of Ebenezer Scrooge. Loving man who he looks for the good in all people and lives in that state of being. Worships his family. *(32 lines)*
- NEPHEW (m).....Late 20's – Early 30's; Very attached to his Uncle Scrooge. Jovial. All the world is a happy place. Nephew will never give up on his Uncle Scrooge. *(16 lines)*
- LADY (f)30's – 40's; Loves children. Devotes her life to helping the destitute. *(5 lines)*
- JACOB MARLEY (m)5 to 10 years younger than Scrooge; A ghost. Scrooge's first teacher. Not scary, but strong. A message giver. *(9 lines)*

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- PAST (f).....20’s – 30’s; The Ghost of Christmas Past. She is timid, the opposite of what a ghost is “supposed” to be. *(16 lines)*
- BELLE (f).....20; A young woman who loved Scrooge but refused to live an unfulfilling life with him. Money meant very little to her. *(7 lines)*
- BELLE’S FRIEND (f).....20’s; Very sweet. Supportive of Belle. *(1 line)*
- PRESENT (m)20’s – 30’s; The Ghost of Christmas Present. He is unique, not like anyone else and that is a good thing to be. He is a bumbling talker, trips, makes mistakes, and does silly things. *(22 lines)*
- MRS. CRATCHIT (f).....early 30’s; A very loving, compassionate woman. Motherly type. Quiet. Adores her family. The voice of reality about Scrooge to her husband, Bob Cratchit. *(8 lines)*
- WIFE (f).....20’s – early 30’s; Newlywed. Jovial. Very much in love. She thinks Scrooge is quite comical. She is willing to accept him with open arms if he wants to be part of the family. However, she can go either way with it depending on what her husband wants. *(4 lines)*
- FUTURE (f/m).....Any age; The Ghost of Christmas Future. Scary. Drives the message home about Scrooge’s mortality. Shows Scrooge a bleak future. *(Non-Speaking.)*
- VOICE #1 (f/m).....*(4 lines)*
- VOICE #2 (f/m).....*(4 lines)*
- BOY / GIRL (f/m).....17; A bit of a wise-guy/girl. *(5 lines)*
- STORE OWNER (f/m).....20+; Friendly. A bit leery of Scrooge. *(5 lines)*

DURATION: 50 – 75 Minutes (depending on improvisation and music)

SUGGESTED DOUBLING

- Nephew and Boy
- Lady, The Ghost of Christmas Past, Voice #2, and Girl
- Jacob Marley and The Ghost of Christmas Future
- Belle and Wife
- Belle's Friend and Mrs. Cratchit
- The Ghost of Christmas Present, Voice #1, and Store Owner

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The play was written as a family adaptation. Having managed an off-off-Broadway theatre for several years, I have seen little children bolt from the audience in fear over the smallest things. The challenge was to write an adaptation that would not frighten the little ones, while still entertaining an older audience. I accomplished this by having the Ghosts of Christmas Past and Present be funny ghosts. The children fell in love with these ghosts in the premier productions, waiting to meet them in the lobby after the play and mimicking them as they left the theatre.

Although it is a comedy, there are many themes running throughout the play. The overall theme is: loving and caring for people is the most important thing in the world. There are many messages for the children and adults. Some of the messages are:

- 1) Jacob Marley teaches Scrooge that mankind should be his main business. That the true business of this world is to care for people. To show them a generosity of spirit.
- 2) The Ghost of Christmas Past is timid, couldn't scare a fly off the wall. However, she teaches that it's okay to ask for help, and with a little help, you can gain confidence.
- 3) The Ghost of Christmas Past teaches that feelings are important.
- 4) The Ghost of Christmas Present is a bumbling talker who trips, makes mistakes, and causes people to laugh at him. However, he teaches that just because he trips, makes mistakes, and does things that are different from the way Scrooge does them, he still has a lot to offer and deserves Scrooge's

respect. He then realizes that Scrooge's respect does not matter much because The Ghost respects himself.

5) The Ghost of Christmas Present reminds us that if we do not love, nurture, and care for the needs of our children, they will grow into the adults of the future who will become the downfall of humanity. Scrooge then goes on to tell him how he could have turned out to be a different person had someone shown him kindness and love and nurtured him along when he was a child.

6) The Ghost of Christmas Present goes on to tell us that every child is every man's responsibility.

7) The Ghost of Christmas Future shows Scrooge how transient and meaningless "things" are. Love for Tiny Tim is what brings Scrooge back to his humanity.

PROPS

ALL SCENES:

- 2 Desks
- 2 Wooden Chairs
- Night table
- Armchair
- Grandfather clock
- Bed
- 2 Blankets
- Sheet
- Pillow
- Pillow Case
- Young woman's framed portrait
- Fireplace mantle
- Bucket of coal with a shovel
- 5 candlestick holders
- 5 candles

SCENE 1:

- Crutches
- Fake money
- 2 Accounting Ledgers
- 2 feather pens in pen holders
- 2 inkwells
- Clothing to include mittens, earmuffs, hat, scarf, jacket, and coat for Cratchitt
- Magnifying glass
- Earmuffs, mittens, hat

SCENE 2:

- Chains for Marley (bicycle chains with the following items attached, if possible: cash boxes, ledgers, deeds, large keys, padlocks, etc. all painted yellow, red, etc.)

SCENE 3:

- Clicker
- Sparkles (Magic Moon Dust)
- Magic Moon Dust Purse
- Megaphone
- Engagement ring

SCENE 4:

- Crutches
- 2 doilies
- Family pictures in desk picture frames
- Duffel bag
- Small, old looking book
- Two small dolls
- Menorah, or Jack-o-lantern, or chocolate Easter bunny, etc.
- Spray deodorant
- Sun glasses (Ghost Shades)
- Flashlight
- Wine bottle
- 2 wine glasses

- Flowers
- Watch

SCENE 5:

- Crutches
- 2 doilies
- Family pictures in desk picture frames
- Teddy Bear
- Hooded black robe
- Black gloves with cut out fingertips or black gloves with long, black fingernails sewn on.
- Very long, curving, black finger nails (see above prop)
- Black armband

SCENE 6:

- Fake money
- Note paper
- Feather pen
- Butcher's white long apron
- Very large burlap bag for turkey (should be a little less than ½ the size of Tiny Tim)

SCENE 7:

- 2 Accounting Ledgers
- 2 feather pens in pen holders
- 2 inkwells
- Clothing to include mittens, earmuffs, hat, scarf, jacket, and coat for Cratchitt
- Vest pocket watch on a chain
- 2 cigars

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The first production of *A Christmas Carol* adapted by Sandra Nordgren was performed during the winter of 1996/1997 at New York City's Thirteenth Street Repertory Company and was directed by Eric Conner. The Cast included:

Karen Allen
Karey Butterworth
Michael Calderon
Michael DeRosa
Jan Gelberman
Philippe Hartmann
Jack Kahan
Gavin Morris
Mark Wallace

A note from the playwright:

A loving thank you to Thirteenth Street Repertory Company's founder and Artistic Director, Edith O'Hara, for her support and love without which this adaptation would not have been written.

A special thank you to the actors and to Eric Conner for his creative insights, suggestions, and humor.

SCENE 1

SETTING: *Various locations in and around London, England, including SCROOGE'S home and office and the CRATCHIT home.*

TIME: *The action of the play takes place on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and the morning after Christmas, 1843.*

AT RISE: *SR – Two desks, one larger than the other, two chairs, candles in holders, and a fireplace. Each desk has an accounting ledger, a feather pen in a holder, and an ink well. SCROOGE'S desk has a large amount of money on it. SL - A made up bed with a pillow and a folded blanket at the foot of the bed, a night table, a clock, candles in holders, an armchair, and a young woman's framed portrait hanging on the wall. SR-SCROOGE and CRATCHIT are motionless. SCROOGE is seated at the larger desk, holding money. CRATCHIT is seated at the smaller desk writing in a ledger. TINY TIM is seated on the stage steps holding crutches. SPOTLIGHT ON TINY TIM.*

TINY TIM: Hello everybody. My name is Tiny Tim. I was just about to go out to meet my father. We're going to church to have the priest say a prayer for me. You see, I'm sick. The priest says that God will answer our prayers and make me well. I just wish he would do it soon, 'cause my legs hurt a lot and I get tired so fast. Sometimes kids call me names and make fun of me. That really hurts my feelings. I wish they wouldn't do that. They can run and play and I can't. So when they make fun of me, that hurts twice as much. But tonight is a very special night. It's Christmas Eve! After church we're going to the pond to watch kids ice slide! I can't wait! Well, I better go. I don't want to be late. I'll see you later!

TINY TIM exits. SPOTLIGHT off. LIGHTS FADE UP. SCROOGE and CRATCHIT come to life. SCROOGE counts money. CRATCHIT walks to the fireplace, blowing into his hands and rubbing his arms. He is shivering.

SCROOGE: Cratchit! Get away from that fireplace.

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CRATCHIT: (*Teeth chattering from the cold.*) I was just going to throw a little more coal on the fire.

SCROOGE: (*Annoyed. Points to his head.*) Cratchit, do you know what this is?

CRATCHIT: (*Puzzled. Looks at the audience.*) Your head?

SCROOGE: And what is inside my head?

CRATCHIT: (*Puzzled. Looks inside SCROOGE'S ear. Then picks up a magnifying glass from the desk and uses it to look inside SCROOGE'S ear.*) Your brain?

SCROOGE: And what does my brain do?

CRATCHIT: (*Shrugs, pauses.*) It thinks?

SCROOGE: Very good. It thinks, Mr. Cratchit. Now think! If you are cold, what can you do to keep warm? Something that does not cost extra money.

CRATCHIT: (*Looks around and shrugs.*) Put more clothes on?

SCROOGE: Precisely.

CRATCHIT: I put on my jacket, but I was still cold. Then, I put on my coat. When that wasn't enough, I put on my scarf. There's nothing left.

SCROOGE: (*Sighs.*) Where are your mittens, earmuffs, and hat? Put them on. Surely, they should keep you sufficiently warm until it is time to leave. Think Cratchit. Think! Use *your* brain!

CRATCHIT: (*Puts on mittens and struggles with earmuffs. They keep collapsing when he tries to put them on. Speaks in a whisper to himself.*) My brain is too cold to think.

SCROOGE: What was that?

CRATCHIT: (*Timidly.*) Nothing sir. I was just saying my brain is... on hold... I think.

SCROOGE: Well, take it off "hold" and get back to work. And no more sneaking coal in the fire unless you want to lose your job. When you burn coal it is the same as burning my money and you do not want to do that now, do you Mr. Cratchit?

CRATCHIT: No sir.

SCROOGE: Good. Then get back to work. You are wasting both my time *and* my money.

NEPHEW enters the office.

NEPHEW: *(To CRATCHIT.)* Merry Christmas.

CRATCHIT: Merry Christmas to you too, sir.

NEPHEW: *(Cheerfully.)* Uncle! God save you! Merry Christmas.

SCROOGE: *(Does not look up from his work.)* Humbug!

NEPHEW: Christmas a humbug? Surely you don't mean that, Uncle.

SCROOGE: Of course I mean it. Anyway, what reason do you have to be merry? You are poor.

NEPHEW: Come then. What reason do you have to be gloomy? You are rich.

SCROOGE: What else can I be when I live in a world of "Merry Christmas" fools? If I had my way, every idiot who says "Merry Christmas" would be boiled with his own pudding!

NEPHEW: *(In disbelief.)* Uncle!

SCROOGE: You keep Christmas in your way and let me keep it in mine.

NEPHEW: But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE: Let me leave it alone then.

NEPHEW: I cannot. I have come to invite you to celebrate Christmas with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE: Never!

NEPHEW: You know Uncle, I will never tire of asking you. That's because my mother loved you.

SCROOGE: And I her. Ah! Fanny. My precious little sister. I loved her so. She died so young. A fragile, beautiful child. So loving. So caring.

NEPHEW: The love she felt for you is still strong, even after her death. That love now lives in me. There will come a day when you celebrate Christmas with my family.

SCROOGE: Nephew. Look at me closely and watch my lips. I will say it one more time... NEVER!

NEPHEW: It saddens me that you are so firm about that. But, I'll continue to remain cheerful and optimistic! Merry Christmas, Uncle. God save you.

SCROOGE: Good afternoon, Nephew.

NEPHEW: And a happy New Year!

SCROOGE: Happy New Year. Bah! Humbug!

CRATCHIT: (*CRATCHIT walks NEPHEW to the door.*) Do not take offense. He can be very harsh for no apparent reason. There are days, though rare they be, when his kind heart reveals itself. It is a pity how quickly it retreats. Instead of being with people, he spends much time alone, daydreaming. You should hear some of his stories. If not for you, he would have no one.

NEPHEW: Ah, Mr. Cratchit, the choice to be alone is his. He edges his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance. He has succeeded except for you and me! It is because Uncle Ebenezer is my mother's brother and because she loved him that I am resolved to keep the bond with him alive, no matter how much he resists. She saw that he is lovable and I am convinced that he must be too. I thank you for your kind words. Good day. God bless. And Merry Christmas to you and yours.

CRATCHIT: God bless you too. Merry Christmas.

NEPHEW exits. LADY enters.

LADY: Good day sir. Is this the establishment of Ebenezer Scrooge and Jacob Marley?

SCROOGE: It is. However, my partner, Mr. Marley, died seven years ago on this very night.

LADY: Oh, how awful for you both.

SCROOGE: Not really. I am still alive. What is it you want madam? I am a very busy man.

LADY: (*Perplexed, but determined to get a donation from SCROOGE. Speaks in a practiced voice.*) I am from St. Anne's Homeless Shelter and at this time of year we are asking for donations so we may give the children a beautiful Christmas filled with toys, laughter, and a delicious, hot meal. What shall I put you down for sir?

SCROOGE: You can put me down for nothing. Where are their parents? Why do I have to feed them? No. I pay taxes to help these so-called homeless, helpless children. And anyway, it is not my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business and not to interfere with the business of others. Mine occupies me constantly. Their fathers should go out and get jobs.

LADY: Pardon me, Mr. Scrooge. You know that jobs are hard to find. There are just too many people looking for work and... their children suffer.

SCROOGE: Humbug. Then I say they should all starve and who cares if they get sick and die. Less mouths to feed. That will help rid us of the excess population. My father taught me to make money, save it, and never ask anyone for anything. Let them do the same. Good day, madam.

LADY: *(In disbelief.)* Starve? Die? Excess population? Do you know what you are saying? Where is your humanity?

SCROOGE: *(Puzzled.)* I said, good day?

LADY leaves. CRATCHIT looks out the window.

CRATCHIT: Might I leave a little early today, it being Christmas Eve and all?

SCROOGE: Christmas Eve! Do you know that Christmas was invented by merchants to make people buy presents they cannot afford, presents that will never be used? Oh! How I hate Christmas.

CRATCHIT: I am truly sorry you feel that way Mr. Scrooge. But, my little boy, Tiny Tim, is outside, right there... *(Points out the window.)* ...and it's very cold out and quite dark already. He is not well. We're going to church so the priest can say a prayer for him.

SCROOGE: I am sure your son will be just fine. You can go to church after you finish work at seven o'clock and not a minute sooner. Christmas! Prayers! Priests! Bah! Humbug!

Christmas music. Lights fade.

SCENE 2

AT RISE: *MUSIC FADES OUT. LIGHTS FADE UP. SCROOGE enters. HE takes off outer clothing and prepares for bed. SOUND OF CHAINS RATTLING startles him. MARLEY speaks from off-stage.*

MARLEY: Scroo--oo--ge. *(Pause.)* Scroo--oo--ge.

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MARLEY enters behind SCROOGE. SCROOGE turns and shrieks.

SCROOGE: How did you get in here? Who are you?

MARLEY: You do not recognize me? Ask me who I was!

SCROOGE: All right then. Who were you?

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

SCROOGE: But Marley is dead. Has been these seven years hence.

MARLEY: That is true. I am dead! Dead as a door-nail! But nevertheless, I have been sent to warn you.

SCROOGE: *(Laughs.)* What prank is this? Warn me of what?

MARLEY: *(In a thunderous voice.)* Look at me Scrooge! This is not a joke.

SCROOGE backs up in fear.

I have been sent to tell you that there is more to life than running a business and making money.

SCROOGE: Well, *that* is news to me. Marley would never say a thing like that. Why, he taught me everything I know about business.

MARLEY: Sadly so. In life, my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole. If I had the chance, I would not be as concerned with making money. We both made money at the expense of other people. Every one deserves a good life, Ebenezer. But we were tightfisted, overcharged whenever possible, and sometimes took people's last bit of money for food.

SCROOGE: *(Waves off MARLEY'S words.)* Humbug! You exaggerate.

MARLEY points to SCROOGE'S throat. The power in his hand causes SCROOGE to choke.

MARLEY: *(MARLEY'S voice is filled with misery.)* You see these chains? They weigh more than I do and I must carry them forever. In life, I made these chains, link by link. Every time I did not care about people, another new link appeared.

MARLEY lowers his arm and releases SCROOGE from choking. SCROOGE falls back into a chair.

MARLEY: *(Continued.)* Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business. Charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, were all my business. The *true* business of this world-yours, mine, and everyone elses-is to care for people. To be kind. To greet them with a generosity of spirit. But you, you will never be able to bear the weight of the chains you are making. Every day at least one new linkappears. You are a mean man, Ebenezer Scrooge. Heed my words for penance is a weighty matter.

SCROOGE looks down at his chest.

In life, my chains were invisible to me, as yours are to you. The first time I saw them was when death took me by surprise. When I died seven years ago, your chains were heavier than these and you have labored on yours since.

MARLEY hands SCROOGE the end of a chain and SCROOGE falls to the ground from the weight of it.

Mine are sooo heavy I want to drag them on the ground but cannot. For you there is still time. For me, there is none. Change your ways, love people, and the links will fall away.

SCROOGE: *(SCROOGE waves a dismissive hand at MARLEY.)* You are not really there. This is a dream. I will wake up and this scary dream will be over.

MARLEY: Oh, man with a worldly mind, it is a pity you do not believe in my reality. But it does not matter just yet, for tonight you will be visited by three spirits. They will show you the mistakes you made and will make. The first spirit will arrive when the clock strikes one. The second will appear when the clock strikes two. The third... well, who knows. It may come at any time. Do not come crying to me afterwards for I will not answer.

SCROOGE: Couldn't I see them all at once and get it over with?

MARLEY: Good-bye Ebenezer. Change your ways and start caring for people or you will pay a heavy price later, and I am not talking about money... money... money...

MARLEY walks off repeating "money" as his voice fades.

SCROOGE: *(He rubs his eyes as though clearing blurred vision. He looks behind a few pieces of furniture and sits on the bed.)* Nothing there. Just a dream. Or maybe a little indigestion. Yes. That's it. My stomach is upset. Something I ate. An old potato perhaps. Or a spoiled piece of mince meat pie. If I close my eyes and go to sleep, I will feel better in the morning. *(Gets in bed.)* Chains. Links. Caring about people. Bah! Humbug!

Lights bump off. Sound of violent wind blowing through the trees.

SCENE 3

AT RISE: Grandfather clock strikes one. SCROOGE is in bed, snoring. LIGHTS FADE UP TO ONE-HALF. SPOTLIGHT on GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST as she enters. SLOW FADE WIND SOUND. PAST conceals a very large megaphone behind its back. PAST sees SCROOGE sleeping, looks at audience and puts finger up to lips as if to say "Sh-h-h," tip-toes over to SCROOGE, puts megaphone to mouth, and speaks in a very loud, but deep and phony voice.

PAST: Scrooge! Wake up!

SCROOGE: *(Jumps up in fear.)* Who are you? *(Rubs sleepiness from his eyes.)* Or should I say, *what* are you?

PAST: *(Still in a deep, phony voice.)* I am The Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE: So Marley was real.

PAST: As real as you are to your form, so he is to his.

SCROOGE: *(Looks around perplexed.)* What?

PAST: You do not understand many things, so pay attention. I have come to show you the past so you may learn from it and change your ways in the future.

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SCROOGE: You!? Bah! Humbug!

PAST: *(Very loudly.)* What was that?

PAST puts megaphone down and lifts arms to the ceiling in a frightening pose.

SCROOGE: *(Cowering.)* Oh. Nothing. Nothing your majesty.

PAST: I am *not* “your majesty.”

Snaps clicker. SPOTLIGHT bumps off. LIGHTS BUMP UP. SCROOGE freezes. PAST timidly speaks in her real voice, a high-pitched, silly tone..

I am The Ghost of Christmas Past and nothing more. *(PAST sees its own shadow on the floor and jumps in fear. The actor should improvise comedic business for the ghost to do during this scene.)* Oh! That’s only me. *(To the audience.)* I thought it was a ghost! Well, it is a ghost... a ghost’s shadow, I mean. Can I tell you a secret? You can’t tell him though. I’m really a friendly ghost, a *very* friendly ghost. But he’s so mean and cruel, that if I talk to him the way I’m talking to you, he won’t listen. So I have to pretend to be scary. That is if I can. That’s going to be hard for me because I don’t have a mean bone in my body. *(PAST looks down at its body.)* Well actually... I don’t have a body at all, so I can’t have any bones now can I? So there. That proves it. I can’t be mean which means I can’t be scary! *(Thinking.)* Would you all help me with something? I need some help to make him think I’m really scary. Can you do that? *(Waits for audience response.)* Good. When I raise my arms up like I just did and say “boo”, if you would be so kind and scream a really loud “boo” with me, I would really appreciate it. O.K? Can we try it? *(PAST raises its arms.)* One... two... three. Boo! *(PAST listens for audience response. Acts as though it didn’t hear them.)* Did you guys scream? *(PAST listens for audience response.)* You did!? Really? Well, I think we should try it again. This time, scream as loud and as scary as you can. “Scary” is the key word here. Mommies and Daddies can scream too. I need all the help I can get. O.K., Ready? One... two... three. Boo! O.K. That was great. You know what? I don’t even need this

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thing (*Megaphone.*), not with all of you helping me. Come on. Let's do it. (*PAST puts on stern expression, turns to SCROOGE and raises arms again.*) One... two... three. Boo!

SCROOGE: (*Crawling away.*) Have mercy on me!

PAST: Mercy comes in many forms Scrooge. I am being merciful by taking you back in time.

SCROOGE: (*Fearfully.*) I am mortal. I cannot travel through time the way you do. I am liable to fall and get hurt.

PAST: (*Warmly. As she speaks she places her hand on SCROOGE'S heart.*) By letting me touch your heart you shall be upheld in this and more.

She looks at SCROOGE for a sign of acceptance. When he nods she speaks.

We must depart from this place. But first, let me take a bit of "Magic MoonDust" in my hand. (*PAST takes "Magic Moon Dust" out of the Magic Moon Dust purse and throws some above their heads. Then takes SCROOGE'S hand.*) Come, let us go time traveling... traveling... traveling... traveling.

LIGHTS DIM. PAST and SCROOGE spin around a few times while PAST sprinkles Moon Dust. Spinning disco ball creates illusion of stars and Moon Dust. PAST and SCROOGE CS hold on to each other as if they have no balance. People in fragments of the past hurry by. NEPHEW enters DSL followed by CRATCHIT and then BELLE and BELLE'S FRIEND. As NEPHEW and CRATCHIT pass SCROOGE and PAST, they speak.

NEPHEW: Uncle, you could have come to my wedding. Just five hours of your time. Life should not be about how much money you made today.

NEPHEW exits DSL.

CRATCHIT: I did not ask for a raise; I asked for a loan. Tiny Tim needs medicine. Please Mr. Scrooge. I am a loyal employee. I will pay you back.

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As CRATCHIT exits DSL, BELLE and BELLE'S FRIEND sit on stage steps. Lights fade up. Spinning disco ball fades out. PAST and SCROOGE watch the two women. BELLE is crying. BELLE'S FRIEND consoles her.

BELLE: I love Ebenezer, but I almost never see him.

SCROOGE: I love you too, Belle. I have never stopped loving you.

PAST: Sh-h-h! She can't hear you. These are but shadows of the things that have been. They do not know we are here.

BELLE: He stays in that office of his all day, counting money, making sure that his *business* is well taken care of while I sit at home and wait. I am lonely. I want him here with me.

SCROOGE: I worked hard for you Belle, for us, to make money to secure our future.

PAST: (*Shouts through the megaphone.*) Sh-h-h!

SCROOGE: (*Holds ear.*) Ouch! What is the matter with you? I am not deaf. Although, another sh-h-h like that and I might be.

PAST presses clicker. SCROOGE freezes.

PAST: (*Speaks to the audience.*) Isn't he silly? He's like a little kid you say sh-h-h to a million times and the kid never listens. I'll bet you all know somebody just like that. That can be so annoying. Well, we should let Belle and her friend talk. Belle just said something very important about being lonely and wanting Scrooge to be with her. (*Presses clicker.*)

BELLE'S FRIEND: He loves you Belle. Why don't you tell him how you feel? Tell him you know his work is important to him and it is to you too. Tell him you fear that he will work even longer hours when you are married and have children and then you will *never* see each other.

BELLE: I have... many times.

SCROOGE: (*To PAST.*) She did, you know. (*To BELLE.*) My dear, sweet Belle. I was so foolish to let you go. I was a happy man then. (*To PAST, nearly begging.*) Let me speak to her. Let me tell her what a fool I was.

PAST puts megaphone to lips threatening SCROOGE. SCROOGE backs off as if to say, "O.K. O.K. I'll be quiet."

BELLE: The man I fell in love with no longer exists. My heart cannot reconcile how much he has changed. He fears the world too much and weighs everything by how much money a person has. Ebenezer was once a man with noble aspirations. They fell away one by one as thoughts of making money consumed him. Oh, it is no use. His reasons for working are many. Tonight is Christmas Eve and where is he? Working. Every year... no... every day, it is the same thing. The business comes first before our life together. He thinks of nothing else. His master-passion is an idol of gold and that idol has displaced me. This is not the life I want. (*BELLE takes off the engagement ring.*) Tonight I will set him free. Tonight I will give him back our engagement ring.

SCROOGE: (*Looks sad.*) And she did. The saddest day of my life. You know, I almost gave up the business for her. But then again, I have gained many riches.

PAST: Riches! Have you? You just said you loved her. But... it is true that you have not felt love for many years. You have forgotten its significance. An extra strong lesson is needed here. (*Thinking.*) I'm going to do something highly unusual. I am going to merge the present into the past.

SCROOGE: I do not understand.

PAST: I am going to send you into the past. You really need to *feel* what you have lost so you will understand its importance. (*Thinking.*) Yes. You will be with Belle again.

SCROOGE: Oh! Thank you! Thank you!

He kisses PAST'S hand. PAST shoos him away, annoyed.

PAST: However! You will not be able to change one word of the past so don't even try to talk to her about how you feel today. When she looks at you, she will see a young Ebenezer Scrooge, a teenager. You will say the same words he said many years ago... and... more importantly... you will *feel* what he felt.

BELLE moves DSC. LIGHTS FADE DOWN to one quarter; SPOTLIGHT fades up where BELLE stands. Joyous dancing music. PAST sprinkles Moon Dust and spins counter-clockwise as the Moon Dust drifts down through the air. BELLE'S FRIEND leaves. SCROOGE sees BELLE and rushes to her side.

SCROOGE: (*Hugs BELLE tightly.*) Ah, Belle. How wonderful it is to see you.

BELLE: (*Shyly.*) And you, Ebenezer.

They look at each other warmly and laugh.

SCROOGE: Would you care to dance?

BELLE: I would love to.

MUSIC. They dance a little. He twirls her and they stop dancing. MUSIC FADES.

SCROOGE: My darling Belle, I am the luckiest man alive. I have you with me.

BELLE: Always. And, we will have the most beautiful family, will we not? With little Ebenezers.

SCROOGE: And little Belles.

They laugh and hug. SCROOGE tries to kiss her cheek. PAST presses clickers. SCROOGE freezes. LIGHTS FADE UP. SPOTLIGHT bumps off. BELLE exits. PAST spins clockwise, puts its hand near SCROOGE'S lips and presses clicker. SCROOGE comes out of the freeze and kisses PAST's hand instead of BELLE'S cheek.

Why did you bring me back just then? That was cruel. We were in love.

PAST: Ah, yes, you were. Love. Do you remember how that feels? Have you gained even the slightest understanding of what you have lost?

SCROOGE nods regretfully.

PAST: *(Continued.)* She truly cared about you and loved you. You have no one in your life that you can say that about now, have you?

SCROOGE: No. But I *have* always loved Belle and still do. If I had the chance again, I would—

PAST: But you *do not* have that chance. The past is *gone*. The only thing you can change is the present moment and the future. Good-bye Ebenezer Scrooge.

PAST exits down the aisle, waving to the audience.

SCROOGE: Wait! Don't go! We were just getting to know each other! *(He looks around the room, frightened.)* Oh! What have I gotten myself into here? If the second ghost is anything like the first, I will be all right. I will be all right.

Lights bump out. Christmas music.

SCENE 4

AT RISE: *SR: A doily and flowers are on one of the tables; doily, family pictures, and a bottle of wine with two glasses are on the other table. Stage is dark. SCROOGE is in bed, snoring. MUSIC FADES. Grandfather clock strikes two. SL LIGHTS UP one quarter. THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT comes down the aisle carrying a very large duffel bag filled with all sorts of things. Present is a bumbling talker. The actor can improvise comedic business.*

PRESENT: *(At the beginning of the aisle.)* Does anybody know where one Ebenezer Scrooge lives? *(Waits for audience reaction. Walks down the aisle flipping through pages of a small hard covered book.)* That lump is Ebenezer Scrooge? *(Finds the page it is looking for. Looks at the page then back to SCROOGE then back to the page.)* Ah yes. Well, he *has* lost some weight, hasn't he? *(Closes the book and talks as if to itself.)* Boo. Boo. Boo Scrooge! *(Disappointed.)* Not good. Not good at all. Just go up there. You're wasting time. Boo! *(Trips and falls on the floor while*

coming onto the stage.) Don't you have any candles? Let's get some light in here. It's so dark, I can't see a thing! First the ghost bus is late. Now this. It's just not my millennium.

SCROOGE: *(Laughs.)* Oh no. Not another one.

SL lights fade up.

PRESENT: I have had a really hard day. Actually, I've had a really hard 300 years. I don't need snide remarks. You are a very critical man, Scrooge! Somebody trips, or should I say, some *thing* trips, and you have to make a comment. You should be over here helping me instead.

SCROOGE: *(Laughs.)* You are a ghost... I think. You should not need my help.

PRESENT: How convenient for *you*. Just in case you care to know, I am The Ghost of Christmas Present. My job is to show you how your treatment of people affects their lives. *(Opens the book and runs finger down the page as if reading.)* I can tell you right now, you're not doing too good in my book.

SCROOGE: *(Sarcastically.)* Ooooo. I am sooooo scared.

PRESENT: Just because I trip and fall and sometimes I can't see well in the dark... Oh, no! *(To self.)* That's why I tripped! I forgot to put on my Ghost shades! *(To audience.)* About me tripping coming in. So embarrassing. Really. I've got to find my Ghost shades. *(Takes the huge bag and looks inside. Voice is childlike as it pulls two dolls from the bag who are supposed to be talking to each other.)* Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet? *(Puts them back in the bag and takes out a menorah or Jack-O-Lantern or a chocolate Easter bunny. It is embarrassed.)* Wrong holiday! *(Puts the item back in the bag and takes out a bottle of deodorant and sprays it on.)* Long bus trip. *(Finally finds the sunglasses, turns back to the audience and puts them on. It does a little "cool thing" - improvises, then speaks directly to the audience.)* I know what you're thinking! If he couldn't see well before because it was too dark, how are those sunglasses going to help? The dark will be even darker. Wrong.

With back to the audience, PRESENT goes into the duffel bag and whips out a flashlight. Turns it on and spins around, flashing the light everywhere, like a search light, ending with the light on SCROOGE'S face.

SCROOGE: *(Laughing harder.)* This *thing* is going to teach me! I think not.

PRESENT: I do things that may not be *your* way of doing them and sometimes I make mistakes, but that doesn't mean you should laugh at me. I deserve your respect. But actually, that doesn't matter so much because I respect myself. Scrooge, your treatment of people, and now ghosts, is awful. I was sent to teach you lessons, so here we go, whether you want to or not.

Turns on the flashlight and, with physical difficulty, acts as though the light has the ability to pull in BOB CRATCHIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, and TINY TIM. They enter SR. Lights fade up on them. They are motionless.

Do you know who these people are?

SCROOGE: No.

PRESENT: Your employee, Bob Cratchit, and his family.

PRESENT shines the light on them and they come alive. They are singing a Christmas carol. They finish the song.

MRS. CRATCHIT: *(To TINY TIM.)* Ooooooh. Your cheeks are rosy pink from the cold. How was church? Did you have a nice time?

TINY TIM: Oh yes, Mommy. We sang all my favorite Christmas carols. And there were candles everywhere! And a great big Christmas tree with all kinds of beautiful things on it. And Daddy promised me that someday I will run and play like the other children and we will go ice sliding at the pond together.

CRATCHIT: That I did son.

MRS. CRATCHIT: And how did little Tim behave?

CRATCHIT: As good as gold... and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful sitting by himself so much and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. Tim, tell your mother what you told the priest.

TINY TIM: I told the kind Father that when the people see a little crippled boy like me, maybe they will remember the birthday of the one who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.

CRATCHIT: (*To MRS. CRATCHIT.*) The boy's wisdom is beyond his young years. After saying that, he was actually able to walk a bit without my help. He seems to be growing stronger and more hearty.

MRS. CRATCHIT: (*To TINY TIM.*) My dear sweet child. You *are* getting stronger every day. Soon you'll be out in the snow playing like the other children. Just give it some time. Now go into the kitchen. I have poured a bowl of porridge to warm you from the cold. Be careful. It is hot. It is on the kitchen table cooling off. You may add a little milk.

TINY TIM: I do feel stronger, Mommy. God bless us, every *one*.

CRATCHIT: He *knows* God will provide everything he needs to make him well. I wish I had his faith. He is getting stronger, isn't he? It is not just wishful thinking?

MRS. CRATCHIT: No Bob. His coloring looks healthier... I think. Oh, I have no answer.

CRATCHIT: (*As if to convince himself.*) His coloring is healthier.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Yes... healthier.

They hug. CRATCHIT puts on a false smile. MRS. CRATCHIT is noticeably upset.

CRATCHIT: (*While pouring a glass of wine for MRS. CRATCHIT and another for himself, he speaks.*) Let us give thanks for all we have. We are rich beyond our wildest dreams.

SCROOGE: (*To PRESENT.*) Rich! Does he have money I do not know about?

PRESENT: Riches come in many forms Scrooge, not just in silver and gold.

CRATCHIT: Let us toast to God, to our children, to our health, to the house we live in, and to the man who made our feast of goose possible, my employer, Ebenezer Scrooge.

SCROOGE smiles sarcastically at PRESENT. PRESENT motions to SCROOGE to pay attention.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Feast! I think not. I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of *my* mind to feast upon. With five children, we should have a goose twice the size, at least. I will *not* drink to that horrible man.

SCROOGE: Bah! Humbug! To you, too, lady.

PRESENT: She is right. You are supposed to be learning from this. And, oh yes. Save your words. They can't hear you.

CRATCHIT: Where is your compassion woman?

MRS. CRATCHIT: Compassion! You want me to drink to that... that... squeezing, clutching, miserable old goat who has not increased your salary in five years! That miser whose bank account grows larger every minute of the day. I think not! He has the power to make our lives better but does nothing. He takes advantage of you knowing that steady employment is nearly impossible to find. And what is the outcome of that? Our dear sweet Tim cannot go to the proper doctors or eat the proper food to make him well because this man you want to toast pays a pauper's wage and we don't have the money to—

MRS. CRATCHIT cries. CRATCHIT consoles her.

PRESENT: (*Crying.*) Do you see what your stinginess has done? Look at the heartache of this family. That poor little boy needs a doctor's care and healthy food, but they can't afford to give it to him. She's right not to raise her glass to you. The strange thing is, Bob Cratchit seems to like you well enough to do so. Thank goodness, for you, there are a few people who see passed your petty, self-serving ways.

Begin a slow fade of SR lights.

SCROOGE: I should have been kinder to Cratchit today. I will make up for it.

PRESENT: You can't "make up for it." The past is gone.

SCROOGE: I thought his wage was sufficient. I did not know he had such a sickly child. How long will it take for the boy to get well?

PRESENT: If the boy does not receive healthy food and a doctor's care, he will not see another Christmas.

SCROOGE: Surely you joke. Are you saying that Tiny Tim will die?

PRESENT: (*Opens the book and flips through a few pages.*) Yes. But what do you care? His death should not concern you.

SCROOGE: I do not understand.

PRESENT: Let his parents take care of him. He is not your concern. (*Reading from the book, emphasizes the words SCROOGE used earlier.*) If he dies, there will be one less mouth to feed. If he dies, that will help rid us of the excess population.

SCROOGE: I see. My own words sent to haunt me. Very clever, but I can see this boy. He is *very* real to me.

SR light fade should be complete as CRATCHIT and MRS. CRATCHIT exit.

PRESENT: And the children you cannot see, are they any less real? No, Ebenezer Scrooge. *Every* child is *every* man's responsibility. *Caring* about people and *loving* them should be your main business. Heed my words. If the children of today are not given love and respect, they will grow into adults who will become the downfall of humanity.

SCROOGE: What you say is more frightening than any ghost. When I think of Tiny Tim I think of my own childhood. Both of us know what it is like to be excluded. He and I do not share the exact same problem, but each of us knows deep pain. When I was a child, no one ever hugged me, or read to me, or looked into my eyes and said I love you. What a poor boy I was, playing in daydreams by myself, isolated and lonely. All children need love just as much as they need food and water. If someone had cared for me instead of leaving me alone most of the time, or screaming at me for little mistakes I made, perhaps I would be a better man today... I wish... Oh! It is too late!

PRESENT: What's the matter?

SCROOGE: There was a boy singing a Christmas carol outside my door last night. I wish I had given him something. That's all.

PRESENT: *(Smiles.)* Yes. I believe you and that makes me happy. *(Looks at watch and sits down.)* We have time for one more visit. Off we go to your nephew and his lovely wife.

SPOTLIGHT on NEPHEW and WIFE as they stroll down the audience aisle, arm in arm. They stop and sit SL on the stage.

WIFE: He actually thinks Christmas is a humbug?! I can't believe it. He is a comical old fellow. I have no patience with him.

NEPHEW: And I feel sorry for him. I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. He suffers greatly in his self-imposed isolation.

WIFE: I am curious to meet this uncle of yours. You say that sometimes when you look at him, you see the essence of your mother's face coming through his. Such an unusual thing to see for she was so beautiful and died young and he is... what is that word you use?

NEPHEW: Withering.

WIFE: Yes... withering... crotchety... old. Seeing her essence through all that is remarkable, is it not?

NEPHEW: Oh yes. Truly remarkable. Though what he looks like has very little to do with it. I see my mother in Uncle Scrooge's face because she is still alive in his heart. I can't tell you how much that means to me. For that reason, I love him. I will keep asking, and one day he will accept our invitation to dine with us at Christmas. When we go home we must toast him, drink to his health.

WIFE: *(Laughing.)* Oh my darling, he is so lucky to have you, as am I. Come, let us go so that we may raise our glasses in good cheer to your Uncle Sca-rooge.

SPOTLIGHT off.

SCROOGE: *(Pleading.)* Spirit, make me visible! I must talk to them! I want to talk with my nephew and niece!

PRESENT: I cannot. No time. I have overstayed my visit as it is.

SCROOGE: Just one minute with them is all that I ask.

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PRESENT: (*Looks at watch.*) I really must be going. I can't miss the next ghost bus. Another won't come for who knows how long. Oh no! I forgot! Scrooge, I need your help. I've been sitting. Something a ghost should *not* do. It's hard getting up, no muscles to help me, you know.

SCROOGE: It is my pleasure to help you. Where do you want to go?

PRESENT: The door would be sufficient.

SCROOGE helps PRESENT up. PRESENT pulls away from SCROOGE and does funny, rubbery-leg-movements.

PRESENT: Stand back Scrooge! Give me room! (*Continues silly movements until standing tall and firm. As long as the children are laughing loudly, PRESENT keeps doing it.*) I hate when that happens.

SCROOGE hands PRESENT the flashlight. PRESENT turns it on and shines it on the floor near its feet. SCROOGE escorts PRESENT to the door.

I must say, I am impressed. God be with you. Good-bye Ebenezer Scrooge.

PRESENT walks up the audience aisle to exit.

SCROOGE: No wait! Don't leave me just yet! I have changed! Maybe you can put in a word for me so the next ghost does not have to come.

PRESENT: (*Sarcastically.*) I don't think so!

SCROOGE: Wait!

PRESENT: Live with it, Scrooge.

SCROOGE: *(Looks around his room frightfully, sits in the armchair, and puts the blanket over his legs.)* Marley said the next ghost could appear at any time. It must be The Ghost of Christmas Future. I do not want to know the future. Why am I so afraid? *(Laughs nervously and looks at the reflection of his face in the window.)* My face in the morning is scarier than those two ghosts were. Just one more ghost and this horrible night will be over. *(Looks around impatiently. Times passes. No one comes.)* Maybe the Ghost of Christmas Present saw that I am serious about treating people differently, with kindness and love. Maybe it told the next ghost not to come. Who knows? *(He yawns and stretches.)* I will try to sleep. Two silly ghosts in one night is a lot for any man.

Lights fade. Foreboding music.

SCENE 5

AT RISE: *SCROOGE snores loudly, is seated in the armchair hugging a teddy bear. Agonized screams wake him as SL lights fade up one quarter. Smoke and light seep through the stage floor door. SCROOGE shrieks. Slowly, the lid of the floor door opens. The screams from within intensify. An arm reaches upwards through the light and smoke. Its black-gloved hand with cut out fingertips has long curving black fingernails. The arm turns DSL and the index finger of the hand points to Scrooge. MUSIC and SCREAMS FADE.*

SCROOGE: No! No! I repent. I repent.

As THE GHOST OF THE FUTURE comes up through the floor door's opening and stands on stage, LIGHT FADES UP on it. The ghost wears a hooded black robe. Its right hand index finger beckons SCROOGE near. SCROOGE shakes his head "no" and covers behind the teddy bear. Angrily, and with great energy, FUTURE points to the floor near its foot. It is like a command for a dog to "come." SCROOGE reluctantly obeys.



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