Preshow

Hello, I'm Vivienne Benesch, Producing Artistic Director of PlayMakers Repertory Company. As the holidays approach, it is such a treat to be welcomed into your homes and ears for Ray Dooley's virtuosic performance of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, adapted by William Leach.

As we at PlayMakers made plans for this unique season, we knew that we wanted to find a way to harken back to the old tradition of Radio plays, where families would gather around and listen to a story together, allowing their imaginations to be transported by the voices pouring into their homes. Providing audiences across the country the chance to experience Ray's extraordinary one man take on the story, which he performed live first in 1998 and brought back to our audiences in 2017, feels like one of the greatest gifts we could give this holiday season. Ray is one of Carolina's treasures, and we're very lucky that he has called PlayMakers and UNC his home for these many years.

This performance also connects us with a tradition going back over one hundred years. When Prof Koch, founder of the original Carolina PlayMakers, first arrived in the Tar Heel State, he brought with him a holiday tradition of performing A Christmas Carol. He offered readings on campus here in Chapel Hill and in towns all across North Carolina. It goes to show that the traditions of gathering and allowing ourselves to be transported and transformed by a story will always live on, even if they may look slightly different centuries apart.

And it is up to all of us to make sure that PlayMakers continues these traditions for the Triangle community for the next hundred years. It's a trying time for arts organizations everywhere, and we're no exception. We are on our way to raising a necessary $1.5 million to Keep PlayMakers Playing – but we need your help to reach our goal. As you're planning your year-end giving this year, please consider making a tax deductible donation to PlayMakers. With your support, we can continue bringing you the quality entertainment and cultural experiences you know and love – just like this performance. You can make your gift online at any time at playmakersrep.org/give.

But for right now, grab your eggnog, gather around the fire, and enjoy Ray Dooley in A Christmas Carol.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL



By Charles Dickens

a one-person performance
adapted by William Leach.

Prologue

~

"A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens.

I have endeavored in my Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humor with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt your houses pleasantly. Your faithful Friend and Servant: Charles Dickens.

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come from the story I am going to relate.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole friend and his sole mourner. Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names: It was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a tightfisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint; secret and self-contained and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue, and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days of summer; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him.

The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over Scrooge in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what is was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge.

But what did Scrooge care? It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance.

~

Once upon a time--of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve--old Scrooge sat busy in his counting house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole and was so dense without, that although the courtyard was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye on his clerk, Bob Cratchit, who sat in a dismal cell beyond, a sort of tank, and was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But the clerk couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room. Wherefore the clerk put on his white scarf, and tried to warm himself at his candle; in which effort, not being a man of strong imagination, he failed.

(Sound: bell at the outer door)

"A Merry Christmas, uncle!" It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach. This nephew of Scrooge's had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, that he was all in a glow. "A Merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!"

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug."

"Christmas a humbug, uncle! You don't mean that I am sure."

"I do. Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? You're poor enough?"

"Don't be cross, uncle."

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

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew," said Scrooge, sternly, "Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it! But you don't keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then! Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

Scrooge's nephew answered, "I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

Bob Cratchit involuntarily applauded.

Scrooge frowned, "Let me hear another sound from you and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation, Bob Cratchit," then turning to his nephew, "You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament."

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow."

"I'll see you first in hell! Good afternoon!"

"I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So a Merry Christmas, uncle and a Happy New Year!"

"Good afternoon!"

His nephew left the room and stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on Bob Cratchit, who cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

"There's another fellow," muttered Scrooge, "my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a Merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam."

The clerk, in letting Scrooge's nephew out had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off in Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and they bowed to him.

"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago this very night."

"Then we have no doubt his liberality is well represented in his surviving partner," said the gentlemen, presenting his credentials.

At the ominous word "liberality," Scrooge frowned, and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?"

"Plenty of prisons."

" And the workhouses? Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still, I wish I could say they were not."

"Oh!" said Scrooge, "I was afraid, from what you said at first that something had occurred to stop them in their usual course. I'm very glad to hear it."

Not to be undone the gentleman continued, "A few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!"

"You wish to remain anonymous?"

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

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

"If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides, excuse me, it's not my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, Gentlemen!"

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labors with an improved opinion of himself.

Meanwhile it was foggier yet, and colder!

The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold, as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol:

God bless you merry gentlemen!
May nothing you dismay!
Remember .....

Scrooge seized the ruler on his desk with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror. "Bah! Humbug."

At length, the hour of shutting up the counting house arrived, and Bob Cratchit instantly sniffed out his candle, and put on his hat.

Scrooge scowled, "You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?"

“If it’s quite convenient, Sir,” said Bob.

"It's not convenient, and it's not fair. If I was to stop you half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound. And yet you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work."

The clerk smiled faintly, "It's only once a year sir."

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning!"

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge, buttoning his great coat to the chin, walked out with a growl.

The office was closed in a twinkling, and Bob Cratchit, with the long ends of his white scarf dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great coat), ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could to play at blindman's-buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's-book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner, Jacob Marley. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where the house had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and- seek with other houses, and had forgotten the way out again. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being let out as offices.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the front door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it night and morning during his whole residence in that place. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley, since his last mention of his seven-years' dead partner that afternoon. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, not a knocker, but .....

(Scrooge:) "Marley's face!"

Marley's face!

It was not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the courtyard were, but had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up upon its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot-air; and though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

To say that Scrooge was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lit his candle.

"Scroooge" (Marley's voice)

He *did* pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door; and he *did* look cautiously behind it first, as if he half-expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on; so he said, "Bah, Humbug!" and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellar below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own.

"Scroooge" (Marley's voice)

"Pooh, pooh!" Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes.

He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs; slowly too; trimming his candle as he went for it was pretty dark....But up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that: darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of Marley's face to desire to do that.

Sitting room, bed-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table; nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate and a little saucepan of gruel.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. He put on his dressing gown and slippers, and his night-cap; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel. It was a very low fire; indeed, nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, there now appeared a copy of Marley's head in every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge.

As he threw his head back in his chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell that hung in the room. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing.

It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below as if some person were dragging a heavy chain. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains. Then he heard the noise much louder, on the floor below, then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

"It's humbug still!" said Scrooge, "I won't believe it."

His color changed though, when without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, it passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, "I know him! Marley's Ghost!"

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pig-tail, usual waistcoat, tights, and boots. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail. Scrooge could see that it was made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the buttons on his coat behind. Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now.

"How now!" said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. "What do you want with me?'

"Much!"--Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?" said Scrooge.

"Ask me who I *was*."

"Who were you then? You're particular for a ghost."

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley," said the Ghost, dragging its heavy chain.

"Can you--can you sit down?"

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me."

"I don't!"

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

(Marley's cry)

Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save himself from falling in a swoon. But how much greater was his horror, when the phantom taking off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

"Man of the worldly mind!" said the Spirit, "Do you believe in me or not?"

"l do. I must," said Scrooge, trembling, "But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

"It is required of every man," said the Ghost, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world--oh, woe is me! --and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!"

"Why are you chained?"

"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. Would you know the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have labored on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," pleaded Scrooge, "Old Jacob Marley. Speak comfort to me, Jacob."

"I have none to give. It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere."

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did so now. "You must have been very slow about it, Jacob."

"Slow!"

"Seven years dead. And traveling all the time?" asked Scrooge.

"The whole time. No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse."

"You travel fast?" asked Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind."

"You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years."

"My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house--mark me! -- in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole."

"But Jacob," said Scrooge, "you were always a good man of business."

"Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the ocean of my business!" It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again. "At this time of the rolling year I suffer most. Hear me! My time is nearly gone....and I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer."

"You were always a good friend to me," said Scrooge, "Thank'ee!"

"You will be haunted by three spirits."

"Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?"

"It is!"

"I---I think I'd rather not."

"Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one."

"Couldn't I take 'em all at once and have it over, Jacob?"

"Expect the second on the next night at the same hour, the third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!"

When it had said these words the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head as before. Scrooge knew this by the smart sound its teeth made when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. The apparition walked backwards from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open. It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did.

When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up his hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear; for on the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

Scrooge followed to the window, desperate in his curiosity.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few were linked together, none was free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power to do so, forever. Whether these creatures faded into

mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home.

Scrooge closed the window and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Hum-" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose; went straight to bed, and fell asleep upon the instant. (sound: church bell tolling the hour)

"Nine, ten, eleven, twelve." Twelve? It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have gotten into the works. Twelve!

He touched the spring of his watch, to correct this most preposterous clock. The watch's rapid little pulse beat twelve and stopped. "Why it isn't possible that I could have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn't possible that anything could have happened to the sun, and this is twelve at noon!"

Scrooge thought and thought, and thought it over and over and over and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was and the more he endeavored not to think, the more he thought. He remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one.

"A quarter past."

"Half past!"

"A quarter to it!"

"The hour itself, and nothing else!"

But he spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ..... (ONE. sound: loud bell)

Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn aside. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them.

It was a strange figure--like a child; yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle on it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers.

But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great candle-extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

"Are you the Spirit whose coming was foretold to me?" asked Scrooge.

"I am," said the Ghost, whose voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

"Who and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long past?"

"No. Your past."

Perhaps, Scrooge could not have told anybody why if anybody could have asked him, but he had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered.

"What!" said the Ghost. "Would you so soon put out the light I give!

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to offend and said, " May I be so bold as to inquire what business brought you here?"

"Your welfare!" said the Spirit.

"Well, Spirit, I'm much obliged. But I can't help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been much more helpful to my welfare."

“Your reclamation, then. Take heed! Rise and walk with me!”

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes. The Spirit's grasp, though gentle, was not to be resisted. Scrooge rose, but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped its robe in supplication.

"I am a mortal and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand there," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heavens!" cried Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!"

Scrooge was conscious of a thousand odours floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten!"

"Your lip is trembling," said the Ghost, "and what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was “a pimple”; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

"You recollect the way?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it?" said Scrooge with fervor. "I could walk it blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!" observed the Ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road; Scrooge recognizing every gate and post and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies were now seen trotting towards them with boys upon their backs. They were in great spirits and shouted to each other, "Merry Christmas...Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas!" answered Scrooge.

"These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us."

The happy travelers came on; and as they came, Scrooge knew and named them everyone. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them? Why did his cold eye glisten and his heart leap up as they went past? Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas? What was Merry Christmas to Scrooge? What good had it ever done to him?

They left the high road, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick. "The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost, "a solitary child, neglected by his friends is left there still." The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Scrooge wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.

"Poor boy...poor boy. I wish...but it's…it's too late now."

"What's the matter?" asked the Spirit.

"Nothing...nothing," said Scrooge. "There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should've liked to have given him something, that's all."

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand: saying as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked; and fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that everything had happened so; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the holidays. Scrooge suddenly glanced toward the door. It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms around his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her dear, dear brother.

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother! To bring you home, home for Christmas. Home for good and all. Home, for ever and ever; and we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world." Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, towards the door; and he accompanied her.

"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered. But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," said Scrooge. "You're right. I'll not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!"

"She died a woman, and had as I think, children."

"One child."

"True," said the Ghost, "Your nephew."

"Yes. My nephew."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "I was apprenticed here."

They went in. At sight of an old gentlemen in a Welch wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling...

"Why, it's old Fezziwig!" Scrooge cried in great excitement. "Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again."

Old Fezziwig rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself and called out: "Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick! Yo ho, my boys! No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up before a man can say, Jack Robinson!"

You wouldn't believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with the shutters--one, two, three--had 'em up in their places--four, five, six--barred 'em and pinned 'em--seven, eight, nine--and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like races-horses.

"Hilli-ho!" cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility. "Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here!"

Clear away! The floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire. The warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and as bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

(music)

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile.

In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In they all came, one after another, some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. There were dances and more dances and there was cake and there was a great piece of Cold Roast and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer.

But the great effect of the evening came when old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners, people who were not to be trifled with. But if they had been twice as many: ah, four times; old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons.

(sound: clock striking)

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two apprentices, they did the same to them. Scrooge's former self turned down the lamps; the cheerful voices died away and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

"A small matter to make these silly folks so full of gratitude. He has spent a few pounds of your mortal money; three or four, perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?"

"It isn't that, Spirit," argued Scrooge. "He had the power to make us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. His power lay in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add it up and count 'em up. The happiness he gave was quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

He felt the Spirit's glance, and stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked the Ghost.

"Nothing particular."

"Something, I think?" the Ghost insisted.

"No. No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That's all."

"My time grows short," observed the Spirit. "Quick."

Scrooge again saw himself. He was older now, a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl dressed in mourning; in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

"It matters little," she said, softly. "To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me."

"What Idol has displaced you?" demanded Ebenezer.

"A golden one. You fear the world too much. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?"

What then?" he said, "I am not changed toward you."

"Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so. You are changed. I would gladly think otherwise if I could, Heaven knows! If you were free to-day, to seek me out and win me now, could even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl. You who weigh everything by gain. And so I release you, with a full heart for the love of him you once were. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge. "Show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?"

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been. That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

"Remove me!" said Scrooge. "I cannot bear it. Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!"

Scrooge observed that the Ghost's light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head. The Spirit dropped beneath it so that the cap covered its whole form, but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light which streamed from under it in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

He was conscious of being exhausted and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and further of being in his own bedroom and had barely time to reach the bed before he sank into a heavy sleep.

Awakening in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of one. He felt he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time. Scrooge wished to challenge the second Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise or made nervous. Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing.

Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came, no shape appeared...except for a blaze of ruddy light which fell upon the center of the room. He began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room: from whence, it seemed to shine. This idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door. The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. Heaped upon the floor were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, great joints of meat, suckling pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince pies, plum puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears and seething bowls of punch.

In easy state upon all of this, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in! Come in and know me better man. I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look upon me!"

The Ghost was clothed in one simple green robe bordered with white fur. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath set here and there with shining icicles. "You have never seen the likes of me before!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," answered Scrooge.

“Have you never walked forth with my elder brothers born in these later years?"

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge, "No. I'm afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers Spirit?

"More than eighteen hundred!"

"A tremendous family to provide for," muttered Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Present…rose.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, submissively, "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson that is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it."

"Touch my robe," said the Ghost.

Scrooge did as he was told and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkey, geese, game poultry, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night...and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning. The steeples called good people all, to church and chapel and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with the gayest faces. And at the same time there emerged from scores of side-streets, lanes and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the baker's shops for cooking. The sight of these poor revelers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood with Scrooge beside him in a baker's doorway, and as they passed, sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch.

"Is there a peculiar flavor in what you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is," said the Ghost. "My own."

"Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?"

"To any kindly given," said the Ghost. "To a poor one most."

"Why to a poor one most?"

"Because it needs it most."

Scrooge and the Ghost went on, invisible, into the suburbs of the town that led him straight to Bob Cratchit's. On the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless the Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch. Think of that! Bob with but fifteen shillings a week himself and hardly a pence for the collection plate; and yet the Spirit of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house.

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own.

"What ever has got your precious father then," said Mrs. Cratchit, "and your brother Tiny Tim."

"There's father coming," said the children and in came Bob Cratchit with at least three feet of scarf hanging down before him; and his thread-bare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame! Then the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the steaming pudding singing in the copper kettle.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mrs. Cratchit.

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

Scrooge looked on as the child's active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken. Master Peter and the two young Cratchits went to fetch the goose at the baker's, with which they soon returned in high procession. At last the dishes were set, and grace was said.

"Dear Lord," said Bob, "for these bountiful gifts and for the gifts of family and brotherhood we are most thankful on this your holiest of days. Amen."

"Amen," they all said.

There was never such a goose. Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family. Everyone had had enough and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows! In half a minute, Mrs. Cratchit entered flustered, but smiling proudly; with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, blazing in half of half-a-quarters of ignited brandy and with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

"Oh, a wonderful pudding!" said Bob. "A wonderful pudding."

Bob Cratchit said that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Then Bob proposed:

"Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God Bless us."

"God bless us, everyone!" said Tiny Tim.

He sat very close to his father's side on his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live?"

"I see a vacant seat in the poor chimney corner and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved."

"Oh, no. Oh, no, kind Spirit! Say he will be spared."

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the ghost and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily, on hearing his own name.

"Mr. Scrooge," said Bob. "I'll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast."

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

"My dear," said Bob. "The children; Christmas Day."

"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!"

"My dear," said Bob. "Christmas Day."

"Well, I'll drink his health for your sake and the days not for his. Long life to him. A Merry Christmas and a happy new year...he'll be very merry and very happy; I have no doubt!"

Scrooge was the ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes. But, after it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before. The chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and by and by they had a song from Tiny Tim; who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

O little one sweet, O little one mild
With joy thou hast the whole world filled.
Thou camest here from heav'n's domain,
To bring men comfort in their pain.
O little one sweet, O little one mild.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof and their clothes were scanty. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty heavily; and as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlors, and all sorts of rooms, were wonderful.

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and deserted moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about and where nothing grew but moss.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where Miners live, who labor in the bowels of the earth. But they know me. See! Hear!"

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. They found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped on. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled, and roared and raged; until being far from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the lookout in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought. And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had a kinder word for one another on that day than on any day in the year; and had shared in its festivities; and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness, it was a great surprise to hear. . . Laughter!

It was a much greater surprise to recognize the laughter as his own nephew's, and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way, holding his sides and rolling his head: Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends, roared out, lustily. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

"He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!" cried Scrooge's nephew.

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge's niece, indignantly.

Then Scrooge listened for his nephew's reply: "He's a comical old fellow that's the truth; and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him."

"I'm sure he's very rich, Fred," said Scrooge's niece. "At least you always tell *me* so."

"What of that, my dear!" said the Nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it."

"I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's niece.

"Oh, I have!" said the Nephew, as Scrooge looked on, "I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it--I defy him. And I think I shook him yesterday.''

It was everyone's turn to laugh now, at the notion of Fred shaking Scrooge.

"He has given us plenty of merriment, I am sure," said the nephew, "and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. So, a Merry Christmas and a happy new year to the old man, wherever he is! Uncle Scrooge!"

The whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew; and Scrooge and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubt of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they had passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly older.

"Are Spirit's lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe, is very brief," said the Ghost, "it ends tonight…at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

“Forgive me if I'm not justified in what I ask, but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it” was the Spirit's sorrowful reply. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe, the Spirit brought forth t*wo* children: wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, "are they yours?"

"They are Man's. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is doom, unless the writing be erased."

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

“Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The bell struck twelve! Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, toward him. It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas yet to come?"

The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

"You are about to show me the shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us. Is that so, Spirit? Ghost of the Future! I fear you more than any Spectre I have seen. But, as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and to do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before him.

"Lead on! Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me I know. Lead on, Spirit!"

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them. But there they were in the heart of it; amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stood beside one little knot of businessmen. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"I don't know much about it," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I only know he's dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe," said the first.

"Why, what was the matter with him?" asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box, "I thought he'd never die."

Scrooge was puzzled.

"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose that shook like the gills of a turkey.

"I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning. "Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to me. That's all I know."

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh. Scrooge looked on in surprise.

"It's likely to be a very cheap funeral," said the same man, "for upon my life I don't know anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?"

"I don't mind going if lunch is provided," observed the man with the excrescence on his nose. "But I must be fed. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha."

The speakers strolled away, and mixed with other groups.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial. Scrooge felt that the unseen eyes of the Phantom were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very cold. However, he resolved to treasure up every word he heard, and everything he saw; and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses were wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.

Scrooge and the Phantom came upon the presence of a gray-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age, sitting in a shop where iron, old rags, bottles, bones and greasy fat from butchered animals was bought. In came a woman with a heavy bundle and flung it at the old man's feet...and said:

"Open my bundle there. Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose. If he wanted to keep these things after he was dead, a wicked old screw, why wasn't he natural in his lifetime. If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself. Open that bundle and let me know the value of it."

"What do you call this, bed-curtains? You don't mean to say you took 'em down rings and all, with him lying there?"

"Yes I do," she said. "Why not?"

"You were born to make your fortune, and you'll certainly do it. His clothes?"

"Whose else's do you think? He isn't likely to take cold without 'em I dare say. You may look through that shirt 'til your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted them if it hadn't been for me."

"What do you call wasting of them?"

"Why putting them on him to be buried in, to be sure. Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. Ha, ha, ha. He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha."

"Spirit!" cried Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man they speak of might be my own. My life tends that way now."

The scene changed and.....Ah! He almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed; on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay something covered up, which though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language. The room was very dark. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man. Scrooge thought, if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts? Avarice, hard dealing, griping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly. Lying in a dark empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child to say he was kind to me in this, in that. The cover on the bed was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger on Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the face.

"Spirit! This is a fearful place. In leaving it I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!"

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head.

"Spirit! I understand you and I would do it, if I could, but I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power. If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man's death, show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!"

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were. She was expecting someone; for she walked up and down the room; started at every sound; looked out from the window; glanced at the clock. At length, the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door and met her husband; a man whose face was care worn and depressed, though he was young.

"Is it good or bad?" she said.

"Bad," said the husband.

"We are quite ruined?" she asked.

"No. There is hope yet, my dear." he said.

"If he relents, there is!" she said. "Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has occurred."

"He is past relenting," said the husband. "He is dead!"

"To whom will our debt be transferred?"

"I don't know. But before that time we shall be ready with the money. We may sleep to-night with light hearts, my dear!" They laughed and embraced.

Scrooge was shaken.

"Is the only emotion you can show me, caused by this man's death, that of pleasure. Let me see some tenderness connected with a death. . .or that dark chamber, Spirit, that we left just now will be forever present to me."

The Ghost conducted Scrooge through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house which was hung with Christmas and found the mother and the children seated round the fire. The Mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing. Quiet. Very quiet.

Mrs. Cratchit laid her sewing on the table, and put her hand up to her face. "The color hurts my eyes," she said.

"The color?" wondered Scrooge.

"It makes them weak by candlelight," said Mrs. Cratchit, "and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. And there is your father at the door."

Scrooge watched as she hurried out to meet him; and Bob, in his scarf, came in and sat down for tea. The two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid, each child a little cheek, against his face, as if they said, "Don't mind it Father. Don't be grieved!" Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. And Mrs. Cratchit said:

"You went today then, Robert?"

"Yes, my dear." said Bob, "I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised I would walk there on a Sunday. My little child. My little, little child. I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim--shall we?"

"No, never, Father!" cried they all.

"And I know" said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was a little, little child; we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it."

"No, never, Father!" they all cried.

"I am very happy," said Bob, "very happy."

"Spectre," said Scrooge. "Something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead? Spirit!"

The Spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on until Scrooge asked him to tarry for a moment.

"This courtyard through which we hurry now, is where my place of occupation is, and has been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be, in days to come."

The Spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

"The house is yonder. Why do you point away?"

The spirit gave no reply.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before. Scrooge followed the Spirit until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard: It was here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground.

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to one. Scrooge advanced toward it, trembling.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are they the shadows of the things that may be *only?"*

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"But if the courses be departed from the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me."

The Spirit was immovable as ever. Scrooge crept toward it, trembling as he went: and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name. EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"Am I that man who lay upon the bed?"

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh, no, no! Spirit, hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this if I am past all hope? Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!

I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me that I may sponge away the writing on that stone! Spirit!"

Holding his hands up in one last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed and dwindled down into a bedpost.

Yes! And the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will honor Christmas in my heart. Oh, Jacob Marley! Heaven and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!"

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms. “They are not torn down, rings and all. They are here: I am here; the shadows of the things that would have been may be dispelled. They will. I know they will.”

His agitation was so great, he hopped about putting his clothes on inside out and upside down.

"I don't know what to do," cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath. "I'm as light as a feather, I'm happy as an angel, I'm as merry as a school- boy. I'm as giddy as a drunken man. A Merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Scrooge laughed and laughed and laughed.

"I don't know what day of the month it is!" said Scrooge. "I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby." Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold, piping for the blood to dance to: (sound: church bells) Oh golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air, merry bells. Oh, glorious.

"What's today?" cried Scrooge, calling down to a boy in Sunday clothes.

"Today?" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day."

"It's Christmas Day," said Scrooge to himself, "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can."

"Hello!" he said, calling to the boy, "Do you know the poulterer's in the next street at the corner?"

"I should hope I did." replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy! A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize turkey; the big one?"

"It's hanging there now!"

"Is it? Go and buy it, and tell them to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man in five minutes and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I'll give you half-a-crown!"

The boy was off like a shot.

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit," whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh, "He shan't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaster over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself in all his best and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth…and walking with his hands behind him, he regarded everyone with a delighted smile. He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows; and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk--that anything--could give him so much pleasure.

In the afternoon he turned his steps toward his nephew's house. He passed the door a dozen times before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash and did it.

"Why bless my soul!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "Who's that?"

"It is I. Your Uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner, Fred. Will you let me in?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. Nothing could be heartier. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness!

Oh...but he was early at the office the next morning. Oh…he was early there. If he could be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon. The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half, behind his time. Scrooge waited with his door wide open, that he might see him when he came in.

Cratchit suddenly was there. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Cratchit!" growled Scrooge. "What do you mean coming here at this time of day?"

"I'm very sorry, sir. I am behind my time."

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

"It's only once a year, sir, it shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir."

"Now I'll tell you what, my young friend. I am not going to stand for this sort of thing any longer. And therefore....and therefore...I am about to...raise your salary."

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler on his desk. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it; holding him; and calling to the people in the courtyard for help and a straight-jacket.

"A Merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. A Merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow than I have given you in many a year. I'll raise your salary and endeavor to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a bowl of Christmas punch, Bob. Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another I, Bob Cratchit! Off you go!"

Epilogue

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. He became as good a friend, as good a mentor, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them. His own heart laughed; and that was quite enough for him.

And it was always said of Scrooge that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us. And so, as Tiny Tim observed:

God bless us, everyone!

This PlayMakers Repertory Company's audio production of A Christmas Carol featured Ray Dooley. It was directed by Michael Perlman, stage managed by Charles K. Bayang and Elizabeth Ray. The sound designer and engineer was Brandon Reed. The stage version of this production was originally produced in 2017 and featured a set design by Jan Chambers, costume design by Bobbi Owen, Lighting Design by Dominic Abbenante and Sound Design by Adam Bintz.

A very special thanks to Susan Sweeney for her generosity in allowing us to share her husband William Leach's adaptation with you all.