

A
Christmas
Carol

An adaptation for a one man play
of
Charles Dickens'
'A Christmas Carol'
by
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A Word of Explanation as to the Structure

Charles Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol' in five chapters which have now become the five acts of this play - there was also a short preface that has been absorbed into Act One.

Whenever possible, I have tried to use Dickens' own words to express the sentiment of the characters, but I have also felt it necessary to add a fair amount of interpretation to some of the speeches in order for the reader not to miss what I believe Dickens was attempting to say.

I have also added my own meaning at various points and developed certain ideas that were not in the original story. It appeared to me that 'A Christmas Carol' has often been a point of self-justification for many watchers who don't regard themselves as evil as Scrooge and, therefore, consider themselves to be 'not all that bad'.

In today's Christmas celebrations, we can justify ourselves with giving to charitable causes (as much as Scrooge didn't) but then go ahead and do the very things that 'Heaven' would hate - and did hate according to Dickens - finding no contradiction in them.

For the message of Scrooge is not one that says we should be at liberty to over-indulge at Christmas but that we should remember the poor and those who are less fortunate than ourselves *that we know* - and that we should *constantly* live in a 'Christmas of the heart' each and every day on earth.

I have tried to dispel the veil that causes us to hide behind this story - and to justify self-righteousness - in the opening few paragraphs and, when the words are too vague later on in the book, have changed them to be all the more specific.

The opening few pages are incredibly silly, I readily admit, but there's very little humour in what follows and the depressing nature of the subject matter made me retain my original script to allow the audience to relax and 'open up' to be able to 'receive' the more serious aspects of the play.

Props must be kept to a minimum as this has been written so that it will be easily 'moveable'. A bonnet to denote the change of sex to Belle and a hat, cloak/coat, scarf and walking cane for Scrooge's walkabout are necessary. The stage set could get away with a couple of chairs only but a table would be an advantage, set off to one side, that can be used as the work table in Scrooge's office (Acts 1 and 5).

I have placed an interval after the end of Act One which makes the play a little lop-sided. It's best done here, though, if needed, as it appears to be the only natural break in the entire book with the original chapters flowing into one another.

I must thank Keith Bailey for helping me on a couple of the interpretations of Dickens scenes and my wife for reading it when I rambled about the house muttering to myself that I could do better.

Act One

Introduction

Narrator:

I have endeavoured in this ghostly tale to raise the spectre of an idea - which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season or with me.

May it haunt their house pleasantly, and no one fail to apply it to their own life. For, although many have found words to justify their own existence, my tale should somewhat rather be applied to one's own, to call us all to account for our cruelty and miserliness towards our fellowmen.

Far be it for us to settle comfortably into our luxurious surroundings, merrying ourselves with the meagre pittance we rattle into the collecting jars of the charities that beg from us! Giving a little and swallowing an elephant, my listeners!

And so to my story - listen carefully and pay attention - for I appeal to you to prove yourself by my chilling Christmas tale.

The Death of Marley

Narrator:

Marley was dead. There was no doubt about it. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, counter-signed by the clerk, certified by the undertaker who'd nailed him into the coffin, affirmed by a passer-by who'd been roped in as a witness for no apparent reason and the chief mourner, co-erced by the thought of a free meal that never materialised, was also he who could testify to the matter.

Scrooge knew he was dead.

Marley was pretty sure that he was dead, too, because he was no longer moving. It was a tell-tale sign, he had to admit, when his body ceased to function that rigor mortis would soon set in and his soul would be gone from this mortal coil.

Even the author knew he was dead because that's how he started his book and there'd be no point mentioning it unless it had some specific relevance to the plot. It would be silly to speak of Marley being dead if, halfway through the book, he came back to life for no apparent reason - even though, had he been writing a present day Soap, he would probably have used the concept to reincarnate a particularly acceptable rogue for a sequel. But this was the nineteenth century - not the twenty-first - and television had yet to be invented.

So we can be certain of this one sure fact - Marley was no more.

You will excuse my long discourse to prove the point, I'm sure. But unless we establish the facts and you're certain of them, most of the rest of my story will have little relevance.

Scrooge and Marley

Narrator:

Now Scrooge and Marley had been partners for I don't know how many years.

The firm was known as 'Scrooge And Marley' - a fairly cryptic title but one that had served them well. Had they lived in the present day and age, they may well have called themselves 'S and M Enterprises' but, way back then, image was nothing and substance everything. Indeed, had they had better PR, I might not have been telling this story at all - but their folly was plain to all and it's for this reason that I'm able to relate it.

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 and he wouldn't've minded being called 'Ogrok the Punile' so long as they parted with their money - he may have objected to the title 'You half-witted old dodderer' but it was never used and, even if it had, the smell of money would've soon allayed his animosity.

The point was that money flowed through Scrooge's veins like lifeblood does through most people's. With every breath he smelt it, in every thought he desired it and with every grasping hand he tried to cling on to it.

Yes, that's right, that's what I'm saying - he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone was Scrooge. A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching old buffoon of a fellow. He was as hard and sharp as flint - and equally as lifeless. No summer could warm him, nor winter chill him - indeed, he was often the frozen wind that blew through the cobbled streets on Christmas night that froze the very heart of those charitable souls who gave from what little they had.

And little they had because of what Scrooge had taken. And Marley for that matter. How 'Scrooge and Marley' was the perfect label for the company who committed the perfect theft, so tight that they only ever breathed in, with a calculating head for money that you would've sworn blind meant that they had a slot in the top of it that swallowed all and rendered nothing - even if you used a knife to try and extract a farthing when you held them upside down over a tallowed candle.

Not that you would, please understand, but it just seemed that way.

Often, Scrooge would be heard to say in his grating voice, 'Bah, Humbug!' and the icy chill of condescension echoed into the most unsuspecting of lives.

Christmas Eve

Narrator:

Once upon a time on one of the good days of the year - Christmas Eve to be exact - old Scrooge sat busy in his counting house, wiping the dew drop from his nose on an old piece of cloth that had seen better days, a present from a past that he chose not to remember.

It was bleak, biting weather - foggy as well. The city clock had just gone three, but it was quite dark already - it hadn't been light all day - and candles were flaring in the windows of neighbouring offices. Scrooge held up his accounting books to the window, trying to read the ledger from the flickering lights across the street, ruing the price of candles and not being able to forgive his conscience for desiring one.

Fred, the Nephew

Narrator:

As was customary at this time of year, Scrooge's Nephew, Fred, paid his yearly visit to invite his uncle to dinner.

Scrooge:

[Scrooge sits at an accounting desk that's off-centre - even to one side. It will be the same place that he sits in Act Five, Part Two. He will not be delivering much of his speech at this place and it serves as a good point to which he can retreat as each of the distractions comes to an end. The fireplace is probably best thought to be on the other side of the stage with the door slightly right or left of centre at the rear so that a walk into centre stage is diagonally done]

Bah! Humbug!

[To his nephew] I live in a world of fools, surrounded by such stupid a people that they wish 'Merry Christmas' to everyone they see - not realising that they're a year older but not one penny richer, not one hour, not one second!

Look at them! *[Scrooge motions with his hand towards a window where the populace rushes by. He speaks the following with an increasing sense of venom in his voice]* They buy gifts they have no money for, get in debt for a season that gives them nothing in return and then plead with me *[Puts on a whimpering voice]* 'Mercy, Mr Scrooge! I have no money with which to pay my rent!'

[As if in conclusion to what's gone before] Bah! Humbug!

[Pause]

[Approaching the nephew with an extended finger of accusation] I'll tell you the type of 'Merry Christmas' I believe in, nephew! If I could work my will, every fool who went round with 'Merry Christmas' on their lips would be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!

[Motions to the outside world once more] If you would follow these *[Pause as he thinks of words]*, these mad sheep, trotting and bleating about the streets, feel free to do so - but let me keep Christmas in my own way without your interference!

What has Christmas brought me, nephew? Nothing but pain! Seven years ago this very night, my business partner died - a man of integrity and forthrightness. Christmas rewards me with grief at its time! Why then should I celebrate it? Why should I look forward to it?

You may well idealise it! You may well see in this one short moment a glimpse of companionship, a reflection of camaraderie - but it's no more than that! It has never put a scrap of gold in your pocket as you rightly state, young man, and, come the morning after, the friendship that you discover will have dissipated like the fog that descends outside and that comes to curse the hand that welcomes it!

Keep your words! Though you are a powerful speaker, indeed, your efforts would be better spent in Parliament!

[Pause. His voice becomes calmer as he talks to himself but, at the same time, he's reminding himself of a time he remembered and of a time that he wishes could return]

Curse this fire! The flames extinguish themselves all too quickly! Sometimes it's just not possible to encourage the last dying spark that brought light and heat to the room! If only I could rekindle the flame that was there, re-light the furnace that I once knew. But...

[Very short pause before returning to speak to the nephew, having been snapped out of his daydream]

Love?! Love?! A poor excuse for Christmas! I would rather see you in hell first than come to share in your festive meal! *[Exasperated]* Love! Why should I be a party to the sentimentality of your marriage?

Bah! Humbug!

Good afternoon, nephew! Good afternoon!

The Charity Collectors

Scrooge:

[Scrooge sees the nephew to the door and returns to the table where he speaks his heart to the audience before being snapped out of it by a knock at the door. He doesn't need to sit at the table but he could do]

So many memories. So many sharp knives that cut at me. No, push them down, keep them quiet. Why should I listen to the voices of the past? What good can they do me now? This life have I chosen - and to this life shall I be faithful.

[Distracted by the knock at the door]

Yes, yes, I'm coming!

[Scrooge twists his face to look puzzled, quizzical, eyeing them with suspicion as if their approach were a cross between identifying them as an armed robber and the grim reaper - don't ask me what I mean, I have no idea. Then with a pretended smile of warmth he addresses them]

Well, unless you've slipped off this mortal coil and our discourse is now elsewhere, you cannot be speaking to Mr Marley. It's just that I haven't had the inclination to change the sign.

[Still smiling] Oh yes, I can assure you that Mr Marley and I were kindred spirits when it came to a consideration of the poor. Yes, that's right. There wasn't a day went

by when we didn't think about their plight and how they might repay their debts. Indeed, we made our business out of it.

To us, the public's poverty was of grave concern - we worried constantly as to how we might get our books to balance without their contribution.

[Pause]

Yes, I said *their* contribution. You heard me right. Why, my fellow, if they spent more time being careful with what they had and not wasting their resources on these festive exuberances, it would make the world a far better place for all concerned!

I'm not without a heart, gentlemen. The prisons are still open, are they not? And the Union Workhouses? Oh, sir, you delight my heart! *[He smiles]* And what of the Poor Law, of the Treadmill? Such fine organisations - are they still at work? Indeed, a joy!

Gentlemen, you initially concerned me, I must say - for I thought that, by your request, there was nothing at all for the poor. But this reassurance has warmed me and confirmed my state of mind that the poor are already being taken care of without my interference.

I can assure you, therefore, gentlemen, that you can put a big fat zero beside my name.

[Pause]

No, I think you misunderstand me. *[He changes from a false humour to a more stern expression]* I do not wish to remain anonymous - I wish to be left alone. 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 through my taxes - they cost enough - and those who are badly off must go there.

[Pause - then more angry] If they would rather die then let them do it and decrease the surplus population! Now, gentlemen, I must be concerned with my business as the poor must be concerned about their own - far be it from me to interfere with other people's! The burden of my business occupies me constantly - as I'm sure it does the destitute - therefore, Good Afternoon, Gentlemen!

The Carol Singer

Scrooge:

[Scrooge motions with his hand and leads them to the door - he may feign their hesitation to leave initially but will smile as they pass by him out into the street. He returns to the table to be distracted again by another loud knock at the door. He fairly runs over and begins to shout at the door but he doesn't open it]

I do not care for Christmas, you impudent Carol singer! Be gone with you, before I open this door and strike you on the nose! Have you no house to go to to celebrate your beloved Christmas?!

Bob Cratchit

Scrooge:

[He begins to return to his accounting table but he turns towards Bob Cratchit and initiates the conversation]

You'll want all day tomorrow off, I suppose, Bob Cratchit?

[Pause]

No, it's not convenient. Why, there's always work to be done - why should Christmas dispel the need? And neither is it fair! You expect me to pay you your wages when I don't receive your work?

Once a year, once a year! The honour men give to the seasons when there's work to be done and money to be made!

Very well, Mr Cratchit! It's a poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December, but I suppose you must have the whole day. Just be here all the earlier next morning!

[Scrooge dissolves into the Narrator]

From the Office to his Home

Narrator:

Meanwhile, the fog and darkness thickened, so that men and women ran about the streets with great flares, offering to run before horses to guide their way. The dank coldness and black darkness engulfed the town as much as it had fallen upon Scrooge's own soul with increasing severity that entire afternoon.

If Scrooge stumbled about like a blind man trying to remember the path to his favourite dark tavern where he took his meagre meal, it was only an echo of the darkness of his soul, fumbling through life trying to find a path that was lit to him.

Having dispelled the ghost of his memories that had been kindled by his visitors, he read all the newspapers, consulted his banker's book as if still dutifully working and went home to bed, past lit houses where the excited talk of men and women only served to remind him of his choice.

He lived in a gloomy suite of rooms where Marley had once lived, the yard so dark that he regularly fumbled his way across to reach the door. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold, preparing a scene for what was about to transpire.

At the Front Door

Narrator:

Now, it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. All thought of Marley had long gone since the last

mention of his partner many hours before in the office - neither was Scrooge one to take flights of fancy, daydreaming and supposing hypothetical events.

He was a man, sober and logical - as if everything that was important to him could be worked out with the calculation of a monetary value or the application of earthly reason.

But, with his key in the lock, Scrooge suddenly saw Marley's face in the knocker - 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. That - and its vivid colour - made it horrible. But its horror seemed to be in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression.

No sooner had Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, than it was a knocker again, the old familiar metal fixing that he daily saw.

To say that Scrooge was not startled would be untrue but, overcoming the sensation that made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end, he put his hand upon the key, turned it firmly and walked over the threshold to light the candle that stood within.

With a moment's hesitation, he looked back at the door as if to discover Marley's pigtail sticking out to accompany his head the other side - but there was nothing except the screws and bolts that held the knocker securely, so he closed the door with a bang and cursed his imagination.

From the Hall to the Fire

Narrator:

In the dimly lit hallway, Scrooge ascended the stairs, imagining the vision of a hearse going on before him as if leading him to a place from which there was no escape. The shadows played with his senses - but he wasn't a man to be frightened by shadows or the echoes resounding through the house of the door that had firmly shut behind.

Darkness was cheap and Scrooge liked it - his pocket liked it even more. It was where Scrooge's heart was, although not where it had once been.

With the faint recollection of the face on the door, he walked through all his bare rooms to see that all was right before securely shutting the heavy door that temporarily banished the memory.

Locking - and double-locking - himself in (although not his custom), he sat down before the fire to eat supper.

The Approach of Marley's Ghost

Narrator:

It was a very low fire indeed - almost nothing on such a bitter night as this. He sat close to it, almost haunched over the thin flames, before he could feel any warmth - in

life, too, Scrooge's presence had brought little of comfort and, unlike the fire, the closer people drew, the colder they'd become.

The old fireplace, surrounded with scenes from the Scriptures told of many heroic stories of times past, etched on the tiles but, for Scrooge, the face of Marley overwrote them all, looking out from each with the same unfeeling coldness that he'd witnessed at the front door.

A long disregarded bell suddenly began swinging and, starting to ring in unison with others in the empty house, announced with ever increasing loudness the arrival of the most unexpected of guests.

The final echoing peel of their sound dissipated into the night as a muffled clanking noise, deep below, began to cause Scrooge to picture in his mind the dragging of a heavy chain. The cellar door was heard to open as the chain rattled into the room, the step-step-step of the spectre ascending the stairs methodically, the volume increasing with each successive pace.

Although refusing to believe the witness of his ears, his eyes bore testimony to the transparent form appearing in his sight - that face, witnessed on the front door, now burst into view.

It was Marley - no question about it.

Impossible it was to mistake the pigtail, the waistcoat, tights, and boots. The tassels on the latter bristling - like his pigtail - and his coat tails and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long and wound about him like a tail - and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds and heavy purses wrought in steel.

Scrooge eyed the half-present Marley with wonder. Here was his old friend, transparent, his eyes looking through his waistcoat and observing the two buttons on his coat behind. He'd often heard it said by others that Marley had no guts but he had never believed it until now.

Though he looked the phantom through and saw it standing before him, though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes and marked the very texture of the folded handkerchief bound about its head and chin, he was still incredulous and fought against his senses.

Scrooge's Reaction

Scrooge:

Humbug!

[Pause. Scrooge appears frightened]

Spectre of the night, what do you want with me?! Who are you? Who were you, more's the point?

[Pause]

Marley? Marley? Is that really you? Then sit down and take your rest with me a while. *[With perplexity]* This apparition is deceitful! For, although I see you plainly with my own eyes, I cannot bring myself to accept that you are who I believe you to be.

No, my senses lie! A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheat me. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato - yes, the consequence of my evening meal. There's more of gravy than of grave about you - whatever you are!

Marley's Discourse

Marley's Ghost:

Man of the worldly mind! Do you believe in me or not?

[Pause]

Then listen to me and hear my warning well!

It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow men, to 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 and witness what it cannot share - but might have shared on earth and turned to happiness!

Fettered I am! Chains that were forged in life - made link by link, yard by yard - and girded on by my own freewill. Yes, and eagerly so I wore them of my own freewill in life that in death there was no escape!

Do not marvel at me, for you bore the same as I seven years ago this very night when I breathed my last! And you have laboured on yours all that time til I've come to pity you when you reach my place.

No! I will not speak false comfort - but honestly I will endeavour to relate. For these very same chains I have will be yours and more. Listen carefully, my friend - hearken wisely to me! For your spirit will never find rest if you die the way you are, double-ironed and captive-bound.

Mankind was my business - just as it is now yours. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow beings with my eyes turned down and never raise them to the One who has now called me to account?

[Almost begging] Hear me, Scrooge! My time is nearly gone.

I am here tonight to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. You will be haunted by three spirits - without their visits you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one.

[Marley walks backward across the stage delivering the following lines, eyes fixed on where Scrooge would be stood. The lighting should be set so that three, then two, one and no spotlight is moved into, creating the effect of the Ghost fading out. With Marley's disappearance off stage, the curtain comes down with the announcement of the interval (if required)]

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

[Optional Interval]

Act Two

The Ghost of Christmas Past

[The second act/second half opens with Scrooge asleep on the floor of the stage. The sound of a bell awakes him although it's not necessary for the sound to be heard. He shows evidence of being startled by the sound and looks around to discover if anything/anyone has come to him. As he turns to one side, he's taken aback as he clearly discovers something that startles him - this is the Ghost of Christmas Past]

Scrooge:

Are you the spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?

[Pause]

Then who are you? Nay, *what* are you?

[Pause]

Is that the Ghost of Christmas *long* past? Of ages long ago that no living man has seen? Of centuries innumerable and long since forgotten? No? Then you have come to show me images from my past - there is no other explanation for it - you must be here to instruct me with memories of those times that I can only now vaguely recall.

[Scrooge rises as if lifted up by the hand and walks as if being led, while saying...]

Yes, lead me on, kind spirit, that I may learn from your wisdom. - although, I must confess, a night of unbroken rest might do me much the better.

[There are five visions - the old school, the return home, Fezziwig's celebrations, the broken engagement and Belle's final happiness. The transition from one to another must be clear cut on the stage, perhaps by moving from one place to another at the right time]

Vision One - The Old School

[The reason why the spirit shows Scrooge his boarding school is to rekindle the excitement of youth that he had long since suppressed and forgotten - and that the young Carol singer had exemplified the night before at his office in the city. Christmas had brought joy to Scrooge as a youth through the band of travelling actors who sparked excitement in him that particular Christmas Eve - so, too, the Carol singer was come to his door to bring the excitement and same joy by carolling the season. Scrooge must recount this vision by demonstrating bodily excitement throughout followed by clear remorse when he speaks of the Carol singer towards the end]

Scrooge:

Good heavens! I was brought up in this place - I was a boy here!

Yes, the sights of the country, images from my youth that draw their own particular smell. It's a long time since these odours have pervaded me, spirit - they kindle within me the memories that I'd long since forgotten.

[Scrooge should wipe away a tear of joy at this point and, perhaps, his voice should've given evidence of it in the final few phrases of the last paragraph. With the next description of what he sees, he should be fairly bouncing off the walls]

I could walk this lane blindfold! This post, spirit, was where we started a race back to the old school and - there! - the steeple. We'd glean apples from the orchard and eat our fill in the graveyard! What memories this bridge, too! We splashed about for fish here - nothing that you could so much as eat but small rays of sun that we'd hold for a while before releasing them back into the stream.

It's as if I've never left!

Merry Christmas to you, old farmer!

[Scrooge looks surprised and watches after the man who walks into the distance]

Spirit, are these but shadows of the things that have been? They seem to have no consciousness of us at all. Still, to see them all again is delightful!

[Extreme delight shines on Scrooge's face as he turns his head to see a memory that sparks in him even more vivid memories. He points as he realises what it is]

My old boarding school!

[Scrooge grows sullen and wipes a tear of sorrow away from his eye. He turns to the spirit to address his next words]

I remember this Christmas, spirit - my friends left for home shortly before the festive season and I was left very alone to make the best of it. I don't believe there was another pupil in the entire school that year.

[Turning back to the scene he realises he's in the old school room, looking at himself]

And there I am, too! Sat alone! How I hated that time! The loneliness was almost unbearable to me - it seemed as if the entire world had found a friend and companion in Christmas but I was on the outside, looking in, but unable to partake of it.

[Distracted by the spirit, Scrooge turns towards it]

What is it?

[Following the finger of the spirit, he looks away from where his youthful presence is sat towards a window. With the following speech, Scrooge grows increasingly excited and makes less and less sense. The gibberish is meant to be just that. Dickens says that Scrooge's discourse was a cross between laughing and crying - both, I believe, from the joy of the recollection]

Why, it's Ali Baba!

You know, just when I was at my lowest point, a travelling band of minstrels came to the old village and with them brought the excitement of Christmas. It was as if the very presence of the season rested upon their acting and singing. They were delightful!

There! *[He points]* There! It's Valentine - and his wild brother, Orson. There they go! And what's his name...*[Scrooge tries to recall by rubbing his chin - but not for*

long]...who was put down in a basket, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus. Don't you see him?!

And the Sultan's Groom turned upside-down by the Genie - *[He points]* there he is upon his head! Serves him right. I'm glad of it. What business had he to be married to the Princess in the first place!

[Slight Pause]

There's the Parrot! Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head. There he is! Poor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came home again after sailing round the island. *[Puts on a dramatic voice in imitation of the parrot]* 'Poor Robin Crusoe. Where have you been, Robin Crusoe?' The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn't. It was the Parrot, you know.

There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek! Ha! Ha!

[Suddenly struck dumb, he turns to where his young form was seated and says]

Poor boy!

I wish *[Hesitation]*. I wish...

...no, it's too late now.

But, still - *[Towards the spirit]* there was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door yesterday afternoon. I should like to have given him something. I do believe he was trying to bring that certain joy to the season that I had long since forgotten.

Vision Two - The Return Home

[The reason why the spirit shows Scrooge the coming of his sister is, in only a minor way, to remind him of his nephew who he'd met the afternoon before - the son of his now deceased sister. The major reason centres surely on the change of heart of the father to bring Scrooge back from the solitude of boarding school to be once more united into the family - although he'd been somewhat of an ogre, the father had been 'converted' into kindness and it's this that Fran is conveying as the messenger. Because the father had changed and brought the son back, the spirit makes Scrooge realise that the same change is possible in himself. Again, Scrooge should show excitement as the news brings him the realisation that his father has softened towards him]

Scrooge:

Another Christmas! My, how much older I am! And how much older the building! I had no idea just how much it had decayed over the years!

And alone again, too.

No, wait! *[Towards the spirit]* This is *that* year, isn't it?

[He turns back towards the scene. Then, with joy] It is!

You know, spirit, my father was a hard man and despatched me to boarding school caring nothing for my feelings or welfare. It would be the making of the man, he said to me, and I saw them little from that day until this.

But my father changed - oh, how he changed!

He became *[Pauses to think and to choose his words carefully]* so much kinder. I cannot for the life of me think why but I know it happened at Christmas. *[He stops as if getting a sudden revelation of the meaning]* Yes, Christmas. As if the very name of the festival brings with it the possibility to change for the better.

[He turns towards the ghost once more]

Is that true, spirit? Is that the reason why you show me this?

I never did go back to that old school.

Vision Three - Fezziwig's Celebrations

[Scrooge is now a young man who finds excitement in the celebrations of Christmas that his first employer, Fezziwig, used to throw for everyone connected to him. Again, excitement as if a child is discovering a rare, delightful experience for the first time. When it comes the time to recall Bob Cratchit, Scrooge will be filled with remorse because he remembers what joy Fezziwig brought but the despair and down-heartedness that he's inflicted upon his clerk.]

[The best bridge I can think of is for Scrooge to have his face light up as he begins to realise what he's now seeing before him - perhaps snapping his fingers to try and recall a name, a place, rubbing his brow to summon the thoughts from within. He eventually fairly shouts out loud the name]

Scrooge:

Fezziwig! *[Then, quieter]* Dear old Fezziwig!

[He turns to the spirit excitedly] I was apprenticed here!

[He looks around] Quick, quick! It's time for old Fezziwig's Christmas celebrations!

No more work tonight, m' boys. Come roll those shutters up!
We'll dance in praise of Christmas time and fill our empty cup!
The year's long gone, and Eve has come to herald in the Day,
So let's wassail with season song - 'A Merry Christmas' say!

Make some room for jigs and reels, come clear away the floor
And push those chairs against the walls - open all the doors,
For all are welcome - one and all - to celebrate this time.
Bring out food, the best of fare - bring out festive wine!

Light the fires, summon warmth - come call the fiddler in!
Let the band strike up the tune - go bring your kith and kin!
For Christmas comes but once a year and quickly it is gone
So let's make merry and rejoice til the setting of the sun.

The Fezziwigs are dancing high in time with pulsing tune.
The sun is setting - Christmas comes - the rising of the moon.
Have meat roast and eat meat cold, partake of a mince pie
Until, at last, 'Adieu, adieu' and to our homes goodbye.

It was no small matter to make the folks so full of gratitude - he had spent, why, three or four pounds of our money (a tidy sum I must say) but it wasn't that - it wasn't that we begrudged having him lavish the money that we could have received in our pockets. It wasn't what was important.

Old Fezziwig had the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. I'd say that his power lay in words and looks, in things so slight and insignificant that it's impossible to add and count them up. What then? Only that the happiness he gave was quite as great as if he'd placed a fortune into our laps.

[Scrooge falls silent once more and is filled with remorse]

I feel pain, spirit.

[Then, to the audience] I feel pain that I should like to have my clerk here now - old Bob Cratchit - and be able to impart some words to him, poor soul.

[Then, to himself] Despair and down-heartedness is all I've brought him at Christmas - why couldn't I have applied the lesson I learnt from dear old Fezziwig?

Vision Four - The Broken Engagement

[The encounter with Belle is set at a time when Scrooge has been in partnership for a while - when the lure of monetary security has turned his head from the happiness he had once experienced in the previous events.]

[From a look of contemplation, Scrooge is struck out of his daydream to shock and a fair degree of horror. This is not a Christmas that he wished to remember.]

[From the horror of the realisation, Scrooge must become Belle - perhaps a bonnet to show the sudden change? The young girl is distressed and sorrowful as she begins her speech - Dickens described her as being in a mourning-dress but there's no indication that she's suffered a recent natural bereavement - and, although she doesn't grow any happier as she continues her speech, she becomes defiant that the course of action she's chosen is the only one to take]

Belle:

It matters little. To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me - a golden one at that! - and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come - as I would have tried to do - I have no just cause to grieve.

[Dickens indicates gentleness in Belle's voice] You fear the world too much. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master passion, Gain, has fully engrossed you. Have I not?

Our engagement was an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. But you are changed. When it was made, you were another man - you didn't pursue wealth for its sake but only as a means to secure our marriage. But now...

...look at you! You have eyes of greed and a heart desirous only of money! And you feel it, Ebenezer - your own mind tells you that you were not what you are. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I have thought of it, and can release you from our engagement.

Your nature has changed. Your spirit has altered. Another hope is at your life's end.

How can I believe that you would even now choose me, penniless as I am, you who weigh everything by the gain it rewards? No, I release you - go your way now, Scrooge, and live the life that your own freewill has chosen.

I know that, in such a short time, you will dismiss the recollection of this engagement for the desire of your new mistress of wealth.

Go, now, Ebenezer! *[Angrily but with despair]* And leave me be!

Vision Five - Belle's Final Happiness

[The final vision is of Belle, now married to another, enjoying the happiness of both her marriage and Christmas with her extensive family. Dickens seems to put it here to show Scrooge what could have happened had he forsaken his idolatry of money and, instead, devoted himself to his true love. Although there's great happiness in this scene, for Scrooge, it's all sorrowful for he realises his loss and that it can't be recaptured.]

[Belle's countenance changes somewhat abruptly from the previous scene to a humourful radiance, a giggling mirth of happiness as she flits about the stage delivering this speech]

Belle:

[The names here are all of her own children and, therefore, they're addressed to humans 'below' her to bring out the reality. In all of the scolding there is only humour - no threat at all. Belle is simply joke-correcting her children. She continually smiles throughout this first speech]

John! Put the cloth down! You know Susan is frightened by the vivid colours. Yes, down I say! Don't make me have to come and see to you myself. Yes, that's right.

No! John, what spirit has hold of you? I swear that sometimes your devilment is more than I can bear. Jack doesn't wish to be tickled! Let me see if you do!

[Pause as she reaches down to tickle John] There! You see! It makes you weak at the knees and helpless!

[She turns] Yes, Peter, I'll come play ball with you in a while. Take Anne outside and throw it to one another until I feed Joseph. Dear Joseph! How I love him!

[To the audience] He has a delight in his eyes that's more than simple innocence. I know this child will be special - he brings an increasingly brilliant ray of light into this house with each passing day...

[Belle is distracted by a knock at the door as her husband returns from the city] Darling! You're home! How I've missed you this day!

Now, children, careful with your father! He can barely stand with the weight that you push against him! Each in good time, children. You'll all see the presents that he's bought you come the morning.

John! Come back with that parcel! *[She chases an imaginary child]* Give it back this instant, I say. That's not yours anyway!

[Suddenly, she's snapped out of her mirth by something the husband has said. She looks at him with blank eyes, recalling a memory that she'd long since suppressed]

You saw Mr Scrooge? And how is he, my dear? Is he doing well for himself?

I've heard said that Marley won't last the night - he's fairly breathing his last as we speak. And then it will all be Mr Scrooge's, I doubt not. He must be one of the richest men this city has ever seen.

Did he look happy, my dear? I've rarely witnessed a smile on that crumpled old face of his - those premature lines of age don't suit him, I must confess. But, alas, one life reaps a certain harvest while another something different.

[Belle pauses and now turns away from her husband. She looks incredibly sad - even distressed. She speaks to herself with pity in her voice and a great amount of sorrow]

Poor old Ebenezer. The old fool - I guess he really did marry the mistress of his heart's desire!

The Death of the Ghost of Christmas Past

[The transition from the sorrow of Belle to the outrage of Scrooge is sudden and fairly unexpected after a short pause. Dickens recorded that Scrooge extinguished the spirit in rage at being shown these things and it will demonstrate to the audience the effect that it's had on him]

Scrooge:

[Very angry and rising to a crescendo - his anger is actually an outworking of his anguish and sorrow that he crashes into at the end] Spirit! Remove me from this place!

I care not that these are shadows of things that have been - you choose to show me these tormentors of my soul!

Remove me! I cannot bear it! Haunt me no longer!

I will extinguish your light myself! No more of this!

Be gone, spirit! BEGONE!

[He breaks down into tears and falls to the ground. His sobbing makes way for quieter whimpering, then sleep as he ends the Act lying on the stage floor as he began it - in the same position]

Act Three

The Ghost of Christmas Present

[If this Act follows on continuously from the second, the now asleep Scrooge should simply get up and put on a hat, perhaps, that denotes a change of character]

Ghost:

[The voice should be deep and hearty as if a very fat and over-indulgent man has just risen from his cosy chair beside an open fire and is delighted to receive people into his home. His voice must contrast significantly with Scrooge's as there's a sharp switch from one to the other later on]

Come in!

[He beckons towards the audience as if inviting them to join him on stage, extending a hand and waving them forward]

Come in! And know me better man!

[Pause]

I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Look at me, man, regard me well!

I swear that you have never seen the like of me before - judging by the surprise betrayed upon your face. But surely you have walked with the younger members of my family? For more than eighteen hundred of my brothers have been born and gone before. I am simply one in a long line - an ageing family that grows young each year.

Know me better man! Regard me well, for I have much to show you and clear instruction to impart.

[The spirit extends an arm as if to grasp Scrooge's and walks with him to lead him through the highways and byways of the city]

Come!

Extend your eyes both near and far, look upon these streets.
Watch the gifts exchanging hands, the conversation sweet.
My presence brings to each a spark to fire up the flame.
The season of the heart long gone has now come round again.

Baste the turkey, roast the duck - come stuff the suckling pig.
Pears and apples, oranges - dates and sun-dried figs.
Seething bowls of punch and ale - poured this festive time,
Port that flows the richest red with cups of vintage wine.

Come with me and know me, man, regard my purpose well,
For eighteen hundred brothers past have come to earth to dwell.
I bring the grace of Christmas now, the season of the soul.

My presence lives from tropic heat to freezing Arctic pole.

The Home of Bob Cratchit

Ghost:

Come, my good fellow! Come and see a house so blessed that the season's merriment overflows from its doors, out into the streets and beyond. For, although but fifteen shillings you pay young Bob Cratchit, his blessing is beyond measure.

I'm sure you remember Belle and her full happiness...

[Pause]

...now come and see it in the life of your clerk.

[The spirit bids Scrooge take a look at the scene that's set out before him. This next scene is written to try and bring out the joy of the household (although I have also included the animosity shown towards Scrooge) and is, therefore, meant to be fairly quickfire one-liners on the whole, flitting between characters - six in all (Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim - son, resident at home, Belinda - daughter, resident at home, Peter - son, resident at home, Martha - elder daughter at work and Mrs Cratchit - it appears that there were, in fact eight characters, the other two being unnamed children that are mentioned in Chapter Four. However, I've had to make Belinda and Peter much younger than they apparently were or else this discourse would get even more complicated than it already is).

[I would suggest that different voices are employed to distinguish the characters from one another as a 'prop change' would be too clumsy. Most of this is meant to be fairly manic. Flitting about the stage as if nervous and unable to stand still is how I see this being delivered - except for the obvious points where the dialogue slows down.

[When we next catch up with the Cratchit's, the atmosphere will be just the opposite as it is now - solemn and quiet, although not morbid. Everything this household is now will be dramatically changed by the death of Tiny Tim]

Mrs Cratchit:

Ribbons cheap but coloured fine! They brighten up the house...

Belinda:

...and the cloth that's faded through the year!

Peter:

Plunge the fork into the potatoes - nearly done.

Mrs Cratchit:

Dear Peter, your father's collar is touching your mouth...

Belinda:

[Reaching for the collar]...let's turn it down. There! A man indeed!

Peter:

[Trying to shake off the women's attentions] Don't fuss so! These spuds must be watched!

Belinda:

I passed the bakers this morning and smelt the goose!

Peter:

It must be ours! Surely father has made it our own!

Belinda:

[Points] Watch the lid, Peter. The lid!

Peter:

[Panicking] This water's boiling over! Quick, help me with the fire!

Mrs Cratchit:

Calm now, Peter! It's only water!

Peter:

[Whining] But the potatoes, mother! They must be perfect!

Mrs Cratchit:

[Looking up towards the door - the next few lines are a little slower and with less excitement] Now where's your father got to?

Peter:

And Tiny Tim.

Belinda:

And Martha...

Mrs Cratchit:

Martha wasn't as late last Christmas Day by half-an-hour!

Martha:

[Smiling] Here I am, mother!

Peter and Belinda:

[Very excited - back to fast delivery] It's Martha!

Mrs Cratchit:

[Spoken calmly and slower than before but with incredible joy on the face] Why, bless your heart, my dear, how late you are! *[She kisses Martha with a loud embrace]*

Peter:

[Even more excited] Look! It's father!

Belinda:

[Panicking] Hide, Martha, hide!

Mrs Cratchit:

Under the stairs!

Peter:

No! Behind the chair, beside the hearth!

Belinda:

No, no! - the closet!

Mrs Cratchit:

Yes! The closet!

[Martha runs to the closet, Mrs Cratchit runs back panting, short of breath]

[Pause]

Bob Cratchit:

[Calmly]

Where's our Martha?

Mrs Cratchit:

[Trying to control her breathing]

Not coming.

Bob Cratchit:

[Incredulous] Not coming?! Not coming on Christmas Day!?!

Mrs Cratchit:

[Still panting] No. She sent a message. She has work to finish.

Bob Cratchit:
On Christmas Day?!

Martha:
[Very excited] Father! Here!

Bob Cratchit:
Martha!

Mrs Cratchit:
You should've stayed hidden, child, we could have continued much longer teasing your father!

Martha:
Oh, mother, I didn't like to. Father seemed so distressed!
[Pause]

Mrs Cratchit:
[Lowering her voice - the dialogue slows at this point, words are spoken deliberately]
And how did little Tim behave?

Bob Cratchit:
[Bob's voice is full of emotion and he only just manages to keep it together. This isn't sadness and isn't meant to be. Bob is touched by the depth of feeling and insight that Tiny Tim has] As good as gold - and better. Somehow 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 to them to remember upon Christmas Day, He who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.

Mrs Cratchit:
[Quietly] Such a child! I wish we had a dozen more!
[Louder] Martha? Would you place Tiny Tim's crutch by the door? He always gets so excited and forgets to leave it there.
[Their quiet conversation is broken by the children]

Tiny Tim:
[Very excited] Father! I've seen the pudding, bubbling in its pot!

Peter:
[Bouncing off the wall] The goose! Look! The goose!

Belinda:

[A little less excited] Can we eat it now, mother?

Mrs Cratchit:

[With mirth] Not so fast! Not so fast! I have yet to make the gravy! Help your father with the table, now. Belinda? Sweeten the sauce, will you? There's a dear. I have it all under control, Martha - sit down and be waited on. It's so lovely to see you!

[There's a significant pause here to denote the feast being eaten. It would probably be appropriate if the stomach is rubbed while emphasising that it seems to have swollen to its fullest capacity - and then some - before the next dialogue begins. Perhaps a chair could be sat on, lounging on its back as if so full that the character is about to pop]

Bob Cratchit:

That was the best goose I ever had. Most delightfully cooked, my dear, and seasoned with the finest spices! Its tenderness and flavour were truly fit for a king!

And the pudding! Well, my dear! I regard it as the greatest success achieved since our marriage.

[Pause]

Now, gather round the hearth - let's gather to drink together and to bless this Christmas as the best.

[He raises a hand as if holding a glass]

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

Tiny Tim:

God bless us every one!

Bob Cratchit:

And I give you Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!

Mrs Cratchit:

[Very embittered, she walks to and fro about the stage as if in a rage. If Bob has been seated as suggested above, she can get up suddenly] The Founder of the Feast indeed! I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it!

Bob Cratchit:

[Calmly] My dear - the children. Christmas Day.

Mrs Cratchit:

It should be Christmas Day, I am sure, on which one drinks the health of such an *[with increasing venom]* odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr Scrooge. *[To Bob]* You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!

Bob Cratchit:

[Peacefully] My dear, Christmas Day.

Mrs Cratchit:

[Calming down]

I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's - but not for his. *[She raises her hand, holding a glass - but fairly spitting out the words]* Long life to him! A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!

Tiny Tim:

[Said loudly and cheerfully] God bless, Mr Scrooge! God bless us, one and all!

[There's a pause while the words echo quiet. It would be best to walk from the place on the stage towards the side where the discourse can be taken up directed towards the spirit by Scrooge who are both now shown to have been listening to what's transpired]

Scrooge:

Dear, spirit. Why show me these things?

[With a little sullenness] Why show me hatred - even though, I swear, I do deserve it - on such a Day as this?

[Changes tone to one of enquiry as if he's trying to forget the hatred directed towards him and dwell, rather, on a happiness he wants to be assured of] Tell me no more of my own harvest - tell me rather of Tiny Tim. Such a pleasant and agreeable child. Bless his name, poor thing. I've seen many a man with faculties complete and yet not as pleasant as he. Tell me, spirit, will Tiny Tim live?

[Pause]

A vacant seat? No, spirit *[Beginning to be distressed]*, say he will be spared! Ten years - twenty! But not one more Christmas? *[Crying]* Will his time come to an end this very year? Surely this can be changed?

[Pleading with the spirit] Spirit! Tell me how! How might this soul be saved?

Ghost:

And what is that to you, Ebenezer?

If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.

What then? *[With increasing coldness as he recites/quotes this next sentence]* If he is destined to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population!

[With slight indignance but increasing as the speech continues until the final line to be elsewhere] Man - if a man you be in heart, not adamant but just - forbear that

wicked proverb of yours that I quote, until you have discovered just *what* the surplus is - and *where* it is.

Will *you* decide what men shall live, what men shall die?

It may be that, in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child.

[Calm and measured] Now, let us be going. We have another place to visit this Day.

At the House of Scrooge's Nephew

Fred, Scrooge's Nephew:

[Dickens observes that he would like to know if the reader knew of a man who was more blessed in a laugh than Fred - he held his sides and rolled his head, he writes, when he laughed - it was contagious in the company he was in. A good bout of laughter should begin the speech - not too long, only a few seconds, before immediately simmering down to explain the reason for his laughter, as if we've come in on the conversation halfway through. Fred should laugh with mirth and be mildly amused through the early part of his speech, taking no offence at what he's witnessed in Scrooge but, rather, seeing something futile in him that cannot cause offence. He will go on to explain this]

Ha! Ha! Ha!

He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live! He believed it too!

He's a comical old fellow - that's the truth: and not so pleasant as he might be.

However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.

And what of his riches? His wealth is of no use to him. He doesn't do any good with it. He doesn't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking *[Dickens observes that he laughs here]* that he is ever going to benefit us with it.

I have patience for him - and am sorrowful, I confess. I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine.

[In contemplation of the matter] The consequence of his taking a dislike to us and not making merry with us is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments which could do him no harm.

I mean to give him the same chance every year - whether he likes it or not - for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it - I defy him - if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying *[with feigned concern]* 'Uncle Scrooge, how are you?'. If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds when he dies, that's something - and I think I shook him yesterday.

[Pause]

He has given us plenty of merriment over the years, I am sure, and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to hand and I say *[He raises his hand as if raising a glass in toast]* 'Uncle Scrooge!'. A Merry Christmas

and a Happy New Year to the old man, wherever he is! He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless.

Uncle Scrooge!

Scrooge:

It's fitting that we came here, spirit, for I see in my nephew the same joy of my sister Fran. Can we not stay a little longer? Perhaps until the guests have all gone? Very well, then, let's move on...

The Death of the Ghost of Christmas Present

Scrooge:

[Looking at the spirit] Your face has changed, spirit - I'm sure of it. Your youthfulness has made way to old age - your hair has greyed and your face betrays lines that I'm sure weren't there when we first met. Are spirits' lives so short that you must die tonight?

[Pause]

I must compliment you on your companionship - rarely have I seen the joy that Christmas brings and, had it not been for your guidance, I should have died in my poverty.

[Looks briefly away]

Are there any other places that...

[Looks briefly around to try and see the spirit]

Now where on earth did he go?

[Pause - a look of extreme apprehension descends upon Scrooge's face]

By Jacob Marley! The clock strikes twelve!

[He sees the phantom as he turns to one side and his dread turns to terror]

What wretched form is this that comes upon me, floating like an all-consuming mist?!

Act Four

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

Scrooge:

[Scrooge is terrified by this ghost's presence. Partly it's because - as he will say - he fears to know the future for he can only see misery because of what he's been sowing. But I believe that his approach is so sudden (The Ghost of Christmas Present almost instantly disappears, midnight strikes and the new spirit, Future, is there) that it adds to his distress.

[This opening speech, therefore, must be with a great amount of fear and trepidation evident in both the voice and body language. Dickens noted that Scrooge 'bent down upon his knee' as if he was in the presence of a divine being. At the end of this Act, Dickens has Scrooge 'fall' before the spirit when he realises that the person about whom they speak is none other than himself.

[A bit of unspoken acting between the last line of the previous Act and the opening line of this is, therefore, fairly necessary]

Am I in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?

You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us. Is that so, Spirit?

[Pause - then, pitifully pleading]

Ghost of the Future! I fear you more than any spectre I have yet 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 your company and to do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me? Are you to remain dumb throughout our time together?

[Pause - then, with resignation]

Very well, lead on. The night is waning fast and it's a precious time to me, I know. Lead on.

The First Businessman

[I have moved Scrooge's words that occur after the third of these four scenes to after their conclusion to allow four different characters to be presented to the audience in 'quick fire' succession.

[Scrooge could point towards an imaginary group of people with a questioning expression upon his face, slowly walking over to the place where the first businessman takes up his speech.

[It's not easy to think of a logical way to go from the end of one speech to the next, so a slight pause and a change of voice seem necessary]

The First Businessman:

[Very matter-of-factly in a voice that somehow resembles the sound made by a politician - clanging loudly but fairly empty of substance. The voice used in the Muppets' version would be almost ideal - Dickens describes the main character as having a 'monstrous chin' as if evidence of his self-indulgence]

I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead. Last night, I believe it was. Nothing much wrong with him last I knew.

[Pause] I thought he'd never die.

Rich bastard *[or 'bugger' or something else that's fairly strong - adapt it to meet the age range that it's being done for]*, he was. Must've done something with his money - even if he left it to his own company, cos he didn't have any children. Certainly no friends. All I know is, he hasn't left it to me *[Laughs]*.

Likely to be a very cheap funeral as well - as I live, I can't think of anyone who'd be wanting to go to it...*[Pause]*...unless lunch is provided *[Laughs again - which then fades out into the next character]*.

The Second Businessman

[Spoken in an air of aloofness. Although the fact of the death is presented to the audience, it's sandwiched between a greeting and an observation about the weather. It's almost as if the businessman has farted for he seems to pay the new fact very little concern. I've not added directions for pauses as I feel it would be best delivered with much shorter gaps, even though an answer is to be expected]

The Second Businessman:

Good-day! How are you?

Me? I'm fine!

Yes, I heard it, too. Looks like the old devil has finally come to collect his own.

I always thought he regarded me as one of his closest friends. We talked once a week sometimes.

Cold, isn't it? Seasonable temperatures, I guess - it *is* Christmas, after all.

You're a skater, I suppose?

You must enjoy this weather, then.

Well, good-day to you.

Old Joe

[Again, the voice that the Muppets used for the spider is just about perfect - as would be the voice of Fagin. The idea is of the lower, lower class - the barrow boy on the streets of London who can do you a deal if the price is right. Old Joe should frequently rub his hands - especially when the subject of what he'll gain out of it comes to mind]

Old Joe:

Now, stop, my dears, until I shut the door of the shop. Let's be alone quietly to discuss this little, er, business proposition. We're all suitable to our calling, we're well matched. Come into the parlour, my dears. Come in and show me what you have.

Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did, I'm sure, so why shouldn't he provide for *us* in his death?

[Pause]

Ah yes, the Undertaker's man - how you mix your profession with just a little bit of villainy. Oh, I see - *[deliberately slow as if he's announcing each item as the other makes it known]* a seal, a pencil-case. A pair of sleeve-buttons? Oh, very nice. Tasteful, pleasant. This brooch is of no real value.

Let me chalk it up to your account *[He writes a figure on an imaginary board on the wall]* - and I wouldn't give another sixpence, even if I was to be boiled alive for not doing it.

Mrs Dilber - you're next. Show me what you've brought Old Joe. Sheets and towels - a fine quality, I must say, my dear. Oh and silver spoons - my, you've been busy. And boots - hardly worn at all.

[He writes another figure on the imaginary board]

I always give too much to ladies. It's a weakness of mine and that's the way I ruin myself. *[He laughs]* That's your account. If you asked me for another penny, and made it an open question, I'd repent of being so liberal and knock off half-a-crown.

And what have you brought me, my lovely?

[He kneels down and unwraps the bundle, holding them up for inspection]

What do you call these? Bed-curtains? You don't mean to say you took them down, rings and all, with him lying there?

You were born to make your fortune, my dear - even death doesn't prevent you from making a killing *[laughs at the pun]*.

And his blankets? My, my - fairly ripped them off from beneath him! Hardly likely to catch his death without them, is he? *[Laughing and looking up at the woman who'd brought them]* I do hope he didn't die of any thing catching? Eh?

[He chalks up another figure]

Well, my lovelies, I *am* impressed - indeed I am.

If he'd wanted to keep them after he was dead - that wicked old screw - he should've been kinder in his lifetime. If he had been, he'd've had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, I'm sure.

It's the truest word that ever was spoken about him. This is all a judgment on him, make no mistake.

Now, my lovelies, let me reimburse you for all your troubles. *[Begins to count out the money on the floor]* This is the end of it, you see! He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit *us* when he was dead!

[He laughs loudly]

Those who Owed Scrooge Money

[This scene actually occurs after Scrooge has been brought to a corpse and told to remove the facial cloth to see who the last three scenes have had as their subject. In that scene he declines the invitation and, rather, asks that he might be shown someone who feels touched by emotion concerning the man's death.]

[This is the spirit's response to that request - although the emotion shown is one of relief and hope that their own fate might now take an upturn. The emotion that Scrooge hoped would be love is actually relief at his demise]

The Husband:

[Dickens speaks of this man as having a face that's 'careworn and depressed, though he was young' but that it bore a 'serious delight of which he felt ashamed and which he struggled to repress'. An expression of mild good humour will be sufficient but it will be well to express a beaming smile at points, only for it to quickly subside as the thought of prospering at another's death hits him once more. He's talking to his wife throughout]

I t's bad news [Smiles] but there's great hope [Frowns].

He is past relenting, he cannot give us anymore time to pay our instalment on the debt. No, dear, there will be no further extension. The man's dead - he no longer has the will to be able to grant it.

What the half-drunken woman whom I told you of last night said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay - and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me - turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying.

I can only wonder at who our debt will be transferred to, my dear. But before that time we shall be ready with the money - and even though we were not, it would be a bad fortune, indeed, to find so merciless a creditor as his successor.

We may sleep tonight with light hearts! *[A broad and beaming smile pervades his smile to conclude his speech. I t will change into Scrooge's very worried face of the next speech]*

Scrooge's Dead Body

Scrooge:

Spirit, I understand concerning this man about whom they speak. His case might be my own. *[Reflective, he stretches out a hand as if leaning up against something about waist height - the table could be used]* My life tends that way, now.

[Feeling what he's leaning against] Merciful Heaven, what is this?!

A dead body?! Spirit! Is this the man about whom they speak? I t cannot be Jacob Marley for that would be the past - but I cannot think who it might be. Who could be the wretch whose death has brought these words?

[Pause. Then, in horror]

No! No, I can't! Lift the sheet? No!

I can't gaze upon this man. I long to do it - that I confess - for I must know the man in question - he's known by those who I myself have acquainted. But I can't bring myself to it, spirit.

I understand you, the purpose for which I've come - and I would do it, if I could. But I have not the power, spirit. Truly, I have not the power.

[He looks around the room, only moving his head] This is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Please, let us go!

[Scrooge turns to walk away]

Let me see, I pray, some tenderness connected with a death - or that dark chamber, spirit, that we left just now, will be for ever present to me.

At Bob Cratchit's House

[Scrooge's face dissolves into emptiness, blankness. If the stage has the prop of a chair, the person should sit down, slunken in his chair as if, burdened with the weight of something, a rest is required.]

[Everything the last visit to this house was, this visit isn't. Then, there was manic humour and excitement - now, there're only cold eyes and seriousness. Then there was the fast delivery of speech following speech - now, slow sentences that seem to take an age to be replied or responded to]

Peter:

'And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them'

Mrs Cratchit:

The colour hurts my eyes. It makes them weak by candlelight; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home - not for the world. It must be near his time.

Peter:

Past it rather. But I think he has walked a little slower than he used to, these last few evenings, mother.

[They fall quiet. Mrs Cratchit is said to begin the next sentence in a 'steady, cheerful voice' but it's a false one that 'falters' halfway through]

Mrs Cratchit:

I have known him walk with...*[She nearly loses it in sorrow]*...I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed.

Peter:

And so have I. Often.

Belinda:

So have we all!

Mrs Cratchit:

But he was very light to carry and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble, no trouble. *[Snapped out of her blank stare]* And there is your father at the door!

[Although Bob says nothing at this point, it would be good to stand as if he's just entered the house, head hung low upon his chest in grief, wiping a tear away from an eye]

Belinda:

Don't mind it, father. Don't be grieved!

Bob Cratchit:

I went to see the grave. 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 him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child! *[He is overcome with the thought]* My little child!

[Pause - recovering his composure]

I saw Mr Scrooge's nephew today and he noticed that I looked downcast. Upon seeing me - for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard - he told me that he was heartily sorry for me and heartily sorry for my good wife.

[Pause. The following four lines are a mildly amusing joke, but they should be delivered matter-of-factly as if the family could no longer see the humour in them]

I don't know how he knew that.

Mrs Cratchit:

Knew what, my dear?

Bob Cratchit:

Why, that you were a good wife.

Peter:

Everybody knows that!

Bob Cratchit:

Very well observed, my boy. I hope they do.

[Pause]

'I am heartily sorry' he said 'for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way' he said, giving me his card 'that's where I live. Pray come to me'.

Now, it wasn't for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful.

It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us.

Mrs Cratchit:

I'm sure he's a good soul.

[Pause]

Bob Cratchit:

I am sure that, however and whenever we part from one another, we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim - shall we? - or this first parting that there was among us?

Peter:

Never, father!

Bob Cratchit:

And I know - 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.

Belinda:

No, never, father!

Bob Cratchit:

I am very happy. *[He hangs his head and wipes away a tear]* I am very happy!

[Silence]

The Parting of the Ghost

[Rather abruptly Scrooge takes up his discourse again. It's abrupt only because the sorrow has made way for an inquisitiveness in Scrooge that's trying to discover the answer to some of his questions before his time with the spirit comes to an end]

Scrooge:

Spectre, 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?

[Scrooge is distracted by the area in which they're now walking]

The old street! Spirit, this is where my place of occupation is - and has been for a length of time. Yes, there! Let me see what I shall be in days to come!

[Scrooge hops to a window where he peers in through the glass]

Nothing. It's an office, I can tell - but it's no longer mine. The furniture is different - even the figure in the chair is not the same. *[Turns to the spirit]* Why is it, spirit, that, no matter where we have gone, I have not yet seen myself and how I will be? Why have you kept me from me?

[Pause]

You have remained silent throughout our time. Won't you say even a few words before you depart?

[Scrooge follows the pointing finger of the spirit]

What's that? This way? We go this way? But this is the graveyard! What business have we here?

[Scrooge wanders around the stage looking at headstones until he catches the gaze of the spirit and, pointing in mimicry, begins to speak]

This one? You want me to read this one?

[Pause]

Is this the grave of the poor wretch that we saw lying dead?

[Goes to walk over but then stops in his tracks and turns towards the spirit]

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 shadows of things that *may* be, only?

[He turns to go to the stone but again hesitates. He wags his finger at the spirit as if trying to teach him]

Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!

[He returns to walk over to the grave stone and, kneeling down, rubs away at the moss to reveal the name]

Oh, dear God! Merciful heaven!

Ebernezer Scrooge!

[He hangs his head and begins to cry]

Am I that man who lay upon the bed?

[Cries]

No, Spirit! No!

[Scrooge gets up, turns and walks to the spirit, once more kneeling and clutching at his robe]

Spirit! Hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I would have been but for the experiences of this night. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?

Your nature intercedes for me and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me by an altered life!

[As he says the final sentence, he falls headlong from his kneeling position and writhes in sorrow and anguish on the floor]

The lessons learnt in the Past, I will live in the Present that I might make a better Future. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!

[The scene ends with Scrooge weeping but, as Act Five begins (which is a continuation of this one, anyway), he realises that the spirit has left him and he's back in his bedroom]

Act Five

Scene One

Christmas Day

[After a short period of weeping, Scrooge suddenly stops, sensing that something's changed. His head looks up, then round, as he speaks]

I'm back!

[He kneels and looks up at what surrounds him]

The bed curtains are not torn down! Rings and all, they're here! *I'm* here, more's the miracle!

The shadows of the things that would have been may be dispelled. They *will* be. I know they will! I will set myself to make sure they will!

[Scrooge now rises to his feet]

I will live in the Past, the Present *and* the Future!

[He now flits about the stage, going to do something but not quite doing it. He almost hops between one thing and another, nervously walking about the stage as if always forgetting the instant he decides to do something just exactly what it was. Dickens observes that his voice flits between crying and laughing, but a demonstration of excited nervousness will be sufficient to make the point]

I don't know what to do! I'm as light as a feather, I'm as happy as an angel, I'm as merry as a schoolboy. I'm as giddy as a drunken man. *[He shouts at the audience as he comes to an abrupt stop]* A Merry Christmas to everybody! A Happy New Year to all the world! Hello? Hello, there!

[He begins aimlessly walking about once more]

I don't know what day of the month it is! 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 than what I was.

[He giggles with mirth - the first he's done the entire play. And he laughs]

From the Window and at the Door

Scrooge:

The church bells! How they sound so new!

[He runs to the front of the stage because of the bells and opens an imaginary window, looking across at the steeple]

I never before enjoyed their sound!

[He then peers down into the street below. He looks dartingly round and points at someone in the street]

You, boy! What's today?

[Pause]

Yes, that's what I said. What day is it today?

[Pause - then with happy realisation]

It's Christmas Day?! *[To the audience - again, with nervous excitement]* I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. *[To himself]* Of course they can. Of course they can.

[Returning his attention to the boy below in the street] Hello, my fine fellow!

Do you know the Poulterer's in the next street but one at the corner?

[Pause]

You do! 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?

Still there? Heaven be praised!

My boy, go and buy it for me!

[Pause]

There's no need to use that sort of language, my good fellow! I'm in earnestness of heart. 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, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I'll give you half-a-crown!

[Scrooge removes himself from the window and flits again about the room, speaking to himself. The first sentence is half-whispered]

I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's! *[Scrooge 'rubs his hands and splits his sides' with a laugh while continuing]* He shan't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim!

[He grabs a quill and writes down an address on a piece of paper. The audience doesn't need to know what he's doing but he should carry the card in his left hand and pay the people at his front door with his right hand. In this way, it's obvious what has been just done when it needs to be understood. Scrooge jolts with a start when the door knocks loudly]

The Turkey!

[He rushes to the door - the door should be located downstairs but, hopefully, the audience will have forgotten that he came up a flight of stairs to his bedroom! He opens the door]

What a size! Surely, he never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped them short off in a minute like sticks of sealing-wax.

Here, my good fellow *[He hands the poulterer the money then, lower]* and your half crown, my boy! Why, it will be impossible to carry that to Camden Town to Bob Cratchit's house. A cab! Summon a cab for me, my fellow, and send it to this address for me. *[He hands the boy more money and a card]*

[As he closes the door, he again laughs]

Out and About

Scrooge:

Now! I must get ready!

[Scrooge rushes about the place, putting on a coat, grabbing his cane, donning a hat and so on (they will need to be quickly discarded for the second part of this scene so nothing that needs buttoning up is wise - a full length coat, scarf, hat and walking stick would be satisfactory) before he finally 'translates' into walking down a road. He beams from ear to ear with a smile and, raising his hat, greets everyone with a loud...]

Good morning, sir! A Merry Christmas to you!

[This can be done a few times before he suddenly sees someone he knows and, rushing over to meet them, grabs them by the hand firmly]

My dear sir! How do you do? A Merry Christmas to you! I hope you succeeded yesterday in your collection for the poor. It was very kind of you to give me the opportunity to contribute to their welfare and you must forgive me, my fellow.

Allow me to ask your pardon.

[He bends over to whisper in the man's ear and then stands upright again]

I have fallen behind on my contributions these years and that will settle my account, I assure you. I trust you will accept it from me. Come and see me this afternoon and I will give you the pledge.

[He continues along, greeting everyone with the previous sentences - or words to that effect]

Good morning, sir! A Merry Christmas to you!

[He arrives at Fred's house and shouts loudly]

Fred! Nephew! Open to me! It's your uncle, Ebenezer Scrooge!

[He raises his hat as the door is opened]

A Merry Christmas, Fred. *[As he wanders off the stage, immediately to return]* Is that offer of Christmas Dinner still open?

Scene Two

Boxing Day

[Having walked off stage, all the clothes put on for the walk are quickly discarded and Scrooge returns, walking about his office on Boxing Day, waiting for the arrival of Bob Cratchit]

Scrooge:

[Flitting about the place as he did at the beginning of part one] He's late! Bob Cratchit's late! That's good! According to plan! It couldn't be happening more perfectly! Eighteen minutes late! My! A veritable cause for dismissal if ever there was one *[He laughs]*.

Here he is! Quick! To the table. Must look like I've been here working for ages.

[He runs over to the chair and sits down, his head bowed over. He pauses a second or so and then looks up with coldness and rage]

What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?

[Pause]

Behind time? I wonder why you even bother coming here, having wasted so much of the day! You are out of order, sir! Now step this way!

[He beckons Bob Cratchit to stand before him]

Now, I'll tell you what, my friend, I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And, therefore...*[Dickens notes here that he leaps from his chair and gives Bob a dig in his waistcoat - it would probably be better to extend both hands as if placing them on his shoulders]*...and, therefore, I am about to raise your salary!

[Pause as Scrooge begins to laugh]

A Merry Christmas, Bob - and how was your Turkey dinner yesterday?

A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary and endeavour to assist your struggling family - and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon over a Christmas jug of ale!

Make up the fires - and buy another scuttle full of coal before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit.

[Scrooge must now make way for the final discourse of the narrator. How to achieve this will be difficult but, if Scrooge's last speech ends with excitement and mirth, the narrator can step forward and deliver the following matter-of-factly]

In Conclusion

Narrator:

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 master 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 - for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe for good without some people making it a point of laughter and mockery.

And, knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms.

His own heart laughed - and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further conversations with spirits but lived for others from that moment onwards.

And it was always said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well, each day of every year.

May that be truly said of us - and all of us!

And so, as Tiny Tim observed, [*spoken loudly in closing*] God bless us, every one!