

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

ACT TWO

Muscle that blends into "Noel, Noel" which blends into the voice of the Boy singing.

Scrooge's bedroom. Dim light. The bed is curtained round. A meager fire in the grate.

Scrooge is standing exactly where the fountain was, but he is in the middle of his bedroom.

SCROOGE. HUMBBUG! HUM — (Pause. Scrooge blinks his eyes.) Oh. What am I doing? (He looks around, amazed.) Walking. In my sleep! (Pause.) I'm cold! Bed! (Scrooge jumps into bed and closes the curtains. Pause. The bell tolls the quarter hour. We hear Marley's Voice amplified.)

MARLEY. (V.O.) SCROOOOGE!
SCROOGE. (Behind bed curtains.) Oh, no! (The bell tolls the half hour.)

MARLEY. (V.O.) SCROOOOOOGE! (Scrooge sticks his head out of the curtains.)

SCROOGE. Marley? Jacob? (The bell tolls the three-quarter hour. Pause.) Nobody there. No Jacob. No ghost. Humbbug! Such a lot of nonsense! (He pulls his head in again. The bell tolls twice. Pause. The fire in the grate blazes up. A strange humming sound. Holly, mistletoe and ivy descend, draping the walls of the bedroom. From ropes or strings hang also long wreaths of sausages, mince pies, strings of chestnuts, red apples and juicy oranges, cakes and pies and plum puddings: all the largess of Christmas, with little mirrors hanging with them, making everything sparkle. Scrooge slowly looks out, sees it all, and very slowly emerges from behind the bed curtains. He stands in the middle of his bedroom, staring at all the marvellous Christmas things suspended in the air around him. The strange humming noise reaches a crescendo. The bed curtains whip back, reveal-

ing the Ghost of Christmas Present climbing out of the head of the bed. He hops down onto the floor. He is a gigantic healthy pink pagan figure, dressed in a huge, loose deep green robe, trimmed with white fur. The humming sound stops.) AH!!!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Merry Christmas!

SCROOGE. Oh, God, another one?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. I am the Ghost of Christmas Present.

SCROOGE. What am I supposed to say? How do you do?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Have you never seen the likes of me before?

SCROOGE. Never!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Aren't you glad to see me?

SCROOGE. No!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Why not? I'm quite a jolly fellow.

SCROOGE. Your comrade of the Past didn't make me feel jolly. I don't think you will, either.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Has any man, ever, made you feel jolly? Or woman? Or child?

SCROOGE. No.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Then try a ghost. Are you ready to go where I will take you?

SCROOGE. Yes — and no, Spirit!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Yes and no?

SCROOGE. I protest! I have been haunted against my will.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Do you regret it? Be honest!

SCROOGE. Well, not entirely. I did learn something.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. But was it enough? Back in your bed, you became your old self again, doubting everything, sneering at everything.

SCROOGE. Well, that's how I've lived! It's hard to change! All these years, I've been, well — bah, humbug!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Are you afraid now that some things may not be humbug?

SCROOGE. Sometimes!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. That should frighten you more than anything. But you must understand what you have been!

SCROOGE. That's hard!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. And you must see what you must become!

SCROOGE. That's even harder!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Try! Here, touch my robe.

SCROOGE. What will you do to me?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. I will help you to see all the things you must see, Ebenezer Scrooge, if you wish to say you have lived at all.

SCROOGE. Lived? Of course I've lived!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. And *want* to live!

SCROOGE. Of course I *want* to live!

Blink
CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Then touch my robe! (Scrooge takes hold of the flowing robe. *Music.* A wild display of on and off lights, which become finally a sky full of very bright stars. The Christmas largess suspended in the air is replaced by the humble wash of a poor home: faded clothes and sheets. The hearth of a small, very poor house appears, in the house of Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's clerk. A few rickety chairs, an old table, peeling plaster, long faded in color. Over the small fire, several pots are boiling. Everything is very cramped and very crooked and very poor and very shabby and very jolly. Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present stand beside it. Discovered at the hearth is Mrs. Bob Cratchit. She is poorly dressed but bravely be-ribboned, as is her daughter, Belinda Cratchit, about thirteen, who is laying out plain chipped pewter mugs and plates on the table. Peter Cratchit, about twelve, is wrestling with his also threadbare but proud clothes.)

MRS. CRATCHIT. Hurry up, Peter. Help your sister.

PETER. Ah, this collar!

MRS. CRATCHIT. Breathe in and hold it, then fasten it.

PETER. Ah — hup! (He breathes in and holds it and tries to fasten his collar. In run two smaller Cratchit daughters, Gillian and Miranda, screaming.)

GILLIAN and MIRANDA. The goose! The goose! We smell

the goose!

PETER. Out! My breath!

GILLIAN. Your collar!

MIRANDA. Why don't you fasten it?

PETER. I'm trying!

GILLIAN. Mother, mother, we were all the way outside and we smelled the goose and knew it was ours!

MIRANDA. O wonderful goose!

GILLIAN. Great goose!

BELINDA. Goose beyond compare!

PETER. There! I've got it!

GILLIAN and MIRANDA. Hurray! (They grab Peter and then Belinda and dance around the table, chanting. Mrs. Cratchit smiles at them.)

GILLIAN, MIRANDA, BELINDA and PETER. (Chanting.)

THE GOOSE, THE GOOSE, THE BEAUTIFUL

GOOSE!

NOBODY HAS SUCH A GOOSE AS THIS!

IT'S PLUMP AND IT'S TENDER AND IT'S HOT!

O HOW PERFECT! O WHAT BLISS!

MRS. CRATCHIT. Where's your precious father, then? And your bother, Tiny Tim? And Martha wasn't this late last Christmas!

BELINDA. Here's Martha, mother! (Enter Martha, also poor, about seventeen.)

GILLIAN. Here's Martha, mother!

PETER. Hurray, Martha!

MIRANDA. Martha! There's SUCH a goose!

MARTHA. I can smell it! Belinda! Gillian! Miranda! Peter! (Martha kisses her sisters and brother, then turns fondly toward her mother to embrace her.)

SCROOGE. Is it a very big goose, Spirit?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. No, it is very small. But they make the best of it.

MRS. CRATCHIT. Bless your heart, my dear, how late you are!

MARTHA. We had a lot of work we had to finish. They made us come in this morning, too.

SCROOGE. Where does she work?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. In a mill.

MRS. CRATCHIT. Never mind. So long as you're here. Get next to the fire, my dear, and get yourself warm!

PETER. Here's father coming!