

MRS DILBER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL

by
Arthur M. Jolly

MRS. DILBER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL

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In addition, professional productions must include "*Mrs. Dilber's Christmas Carol was originally produced at Loft Ensemble in Los Angeles, CA.*" in all programs.

MRS. DILBER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL

MRS DILBER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL premiered in December 2022, produced by Loft Ensemble Theatre, Los Angeles, CA. Direction and Fight Direction by Tor Brown & Marc Leclerc. Produced by Bree Pavey and Sarah Nilsen. Associate produced by Sarah Sommers and Matt Lorenzo. Stage managed by Kathleen Guevara. Lighting Design by Tor Brown. Costumes by Linda Muggeridge, Jennifer DeRosa and Danielle Ozymandias. Props by Natasha Renae Potts.

CAST:

ANTWAN ALEXANDER II	Benny Factor, Topper
LEMON BAARDBSEN	Christmas Present, Mrs. Fezziwig
MACEDONIA BULLINGTON	Roseola Two-Poots
ISAAC DEAKYNE	Jaxob Marley
JENNIFER DEROSA	Emily Cratchit
RAYMOND DONEHEY	Bob Cratchit
MADYLIN SWEETEN DURRIE	Emily Cratchit, Abigail, Chestnut Vendor
JAY HOSHINA	Belinda Cratchit, Mean Child
ROBERT JOLLY	Peter, Chimney Sweep, Sweet Tiny Tim
MAIA LUER	Belinda Cratchit
BENJAMIN MARSHALL	Ebenezer Scrooge, Jekyll, Flan Thropist
MATTHEW MONACO	Mr. Fezziwig, Chimney Sweep
IGNACIO NAVARRO	Frederick, Young Scrooge
SARAH NILSEN	Clarabelicious, Christmas Past
BREE PAVEY	Mrs. Dilber
NATASHA RENAE POTTS	Ghost of Christmas Truce, Little Match Girl

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CAST

11w, 11m, 11gn +ensembles. Casts of 9+ with doubling are possible.

VENDOR	- chestnut selling urchin
SWEEP	- child chimney sweep
MRS. DILBER	- housekeeper
DOORKNOB	- a face in a door. Its nose is the doorknob.
BENNY FACTOR	- charitable altruist
FLAN THROPIST	- charitable altruist
BOB CRATCHIT	- clerk
FREDERICK	- wealthy nephew
EMILY CRATCHIT	- Bob's long suffering wife
JAXOB MARLEY	- ghost of Scrooge's partner
BELINDA CRATCHIT	- youngest daughter of the Cratchits
MARTHA CRATCHIT	- eldest daughter of the Cratchits
PETER CRATCHIT	- eldest son of the Cratchits
TINY TIM CRATCHIT	- hideous monster
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST	- fairy-like child spirit
YOUNG EBENEZER	- school age
MEAN CHILD	- mean little brat
MEANER CHILD	- another mean little brat
YOUNG BELLE	- school age
SCROOGE (18)	- Ebenezer as a young man
BELLE (18)	- Belle as a young woman
ABIGAIL	- Belle's sister
MR. FEZZIWIG	- a kind-hearted merchant
WILL WILKINS	- an apprentice (non-speaking)
MRS. FEZZIWIG	- the worthy partner of Mr. Fezziwig.
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT	- hearty spirit
CLARABELICIOUS TWO-POOTS	- Frederick's fiancée
ROSE TWO-POOTS	- sister of Clarabelicious.
TOPPER	- a bachelor friend of Frederick
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE	- skeletal spirit in a hooded robe
LITTLE MATCH GIRL	- street merchant of inflammatory devices
DR. JEKYLL	- mad scientist
SWEET TINY TIM	- angelic child with a lame leg
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRUCE	- German child
CHILD ENSEMBLE	- School kids, Street Urchins, Cratchit kids
ADULT ENSEMBLE	- Fezziwig Party Goers, Revolutionaries

[OPTIONAL ROLE:]

EBENEZER SCROOGE	- OS voice only or two second cameo.
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MRS. DILBER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL

TIME: Christmas Eve, 1842

PLACE: Bishopsgate in London, particularly:

1. London street in front of Scrooge's abode
2. Scrooge & Marley's counting house
3. Mrs. Dilber's bedchamber
4. Cratchit residence
5. Mrs. Dilber's bedchamber
6. Schoolyard
7. A manor house
8. Fezziwig factory
9. A manor house
10. Mrs. Dilber's bedchamber
11. Cratchit residence
12. Mrs. Dilber's bedchamber
13. Frederick's abode.
14. Cratchit residence
15. A London street
16. A science laboratory
17. Mrs. Dilber's bedchamber
18. A graveyard.
19. London street in front of Scrooge's abode

Transitions between certain locations are magically seamless, sometimes occurring even between lines of dialogue. However, the staging is achieved, action should flow uninterrupted.

Alternate lines for productions preferring milder language, or considerations for actor ability, are denoted by *[square brackets]* and may be freely substituted. All other changes must be approved by the author.

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SCENE 1

A London street in front of Scrooge's abode.

CHESTNUT VENDOR. Chestnuts! Hot chestnuts! Two farthings a bag!

SWEEP. Chimney sweeps! All sweeps guaranteed younger'n eight years old an 'skinnier than a toothbrush! Gitchor chimneys cleaned proper just in time for Christmas! (*MRS. DILBER enters, struggling with a large bag of laundry.*)

DILBER. Oh, Lawks! Christmas Eve, and 'ere I am, carrying a load of dirty underwear and smelly socks for the miserliest man that ever there was. Oh, the injustice! Oh, the humanity! Oh, the laundry! (*DOORKNOB—a brass face built into the door with the doorknob as a nose—wakes up.*)

DOORKNOB. Mrs. Dilber!

DILBER. Blimey! A talking door! Do you see that too, or am I going mad? Eeh, I almost wet meself—a talking door! 'Oo was expectin 'that? Not me!

DOORKNOB. Mrs. Dilber—

DILBER. Don't it hurt?

DOORKNOB. Doesn't what hurt?

DILBER. When people opens the door. I mean, they twist your nose, don't it hurt?

DOORKNOB. No. Mrs. Dilber, tonight, three spirits of—

DILBER. I know it would hurt me. A scaggle of people twisting my nose whenever they wanted to go in. 'Ere! What about people going out?

DOORKNOB. What do you mean?

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DILBER. Well, if they twists your nose on the way in—what's on the other side? I mean, do you go all the way through? What are they twisting to get out again?

DOORKNOB. Mrs. Dilber—

DILBER. I do not like to think!

DOORKNOB. MRS. DILBER!

DILBER. That's my name, don't shout it in the street, they'll all want one.

DOORKNOB. Mrs. Dilber—tonight, three spirits will visit this house.

DILBER. They don't want to come to this 'ouse.

DOORKNOB. But come they will, for these spirits bring—

DILBER. This is Mr. Scrooge's house. They don't want to be caught dead in here.

DOORKNOB. That is why they are coming. To see him.

DILBER. What, Mr. Scrooge?

DOORKNOB. Yes.

DILBER. Ebenezer Scrooge? The meanest, nastiest cheeseparer this side of the river?

DOORKNOB. That is the gentleman in question.

DILBER. Oh, he's as sharp as flint, he is. He pinches a penny so 'ard, Queen Vicky gets bruises on her royal cheeks.

DOORKNOB. Well tonight, he will see three ghosts—

DILBER. He's so miserly, when his mother died, he sold her corpse to the knacker's yard to be boiled down for glue.

DOORKNOB. Yes, about the three ghosts—

DILBER. He's so tight-fisted, you could use his hands to extrude aluminium wire, were you in the metallurgical trade and in need of an extrusion die.

DOORKNOB. Are you done?

DILBER. I think that was enough witty repartee, aye.

DOORKNOB. They are the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Future. They will show him the error of his ways, and lead him to find the true meaning of Christmas—

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DILBER. All right, all right, Mister Door. Some of us works for a living, and working for Scrooge means no time to dilly-dally with doorknobs tellin 'tales about ghosts teaching Scrooge to be mean on Christmas. No time for that, I says. Sorry about the nose.

DOORKNOB. What about my nose?

DILBER. This. *(She turns the door knob, causing Doorknob to yelp in pain, and exits through the door into the house. A pause. Doorknob suddenly screams. The door opens, and Mrs. Dilber enters again, without her laundry.)* That's the laundry dropped off, now I have to go and get something for 'is dinner. *(Two altruists, BENNY FACTOR and FLAN THROPIST, enter, deeply distraught.)* You all right?

BENNY. We are shaken, Madam.

FLAN. To our core, to our very core.

DILBER. What ails you?

FLAN. We just called upon Scrooge and Marley's Counting House.

DILBER. That'd do it. And so's you know, it's just Scrooge's now—Marley's been dead six years. Scrooge never took his name off it—too cheap to buy a new sign. Whydja want to go into such a cold, darksome place?

BENNY. To beseech him for charity.

DILBER. Charity?!

FLAN. At this festive season of the year, we should all make some slight provision for the poor and destitute.

BENNY. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts.

FLAN. We raise funds to buy them some meat and drink and means of warmth.

DILBER. You asked Ebenezer Scrooge for money for the poor? How did that work out for you, as if I couldn't guess.

BENNY. He apparently feels that debtors' prisons and union workhouses, with their vicious treadmills and forced separation of parent and child are more than adequate.

FLAN. He's just so mean.

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DILBER. He is at that. Separatin 'a child just 'coz their mum's are poor? Some'd rather die than have their children taken away.

BENNY. That's what I said—and he—he—

FLAN. He said that then they should do it and decrease the surplus population! *(They burst into tears.)*

DILBER. Surplus population? What's he think he is, an essential worker?

FLAN. Oh, Mrs. Dilber—your employer has a strange and twisted view of humankind.

BENNY. I don't know how you can bear to abide under his roof.

DILBER. Well, what can you do—that's the one percent for you. Not like they'll ever change. I tells you, if he would pay me enough to move out of his house, I'd be off like old milk. Of course, if he was to pay me a decent wage, it wouldn't be so bad in his house, because it is his thrift and stinge that makes it so unpleasant. Bit of a conundrum, there.

BENNY. That house looks colder than his heart.

DILBER. It is drafty at that.

FLAN. And darker than his soul.

DILBER. One candle, he allows. We take turns using it.

BENNY. Mrs. Dilber—here. *(Benny presses a coin into her hand.)*

DILBER. There's others that need charity more than I.

FLAN. For a candle of your own.

DILBER. I don't need a candle. After years workin 'for his stinginess, I can see in the dark like a cat.

FLAN. Is there nothing you want, Mrs. Dilber?

DILBER. Bed curtains would be nice.

BENNY. Bed curtains?

DILBER. Thick, heavy, velvet bed-curtains, to draw closed and keep out the drafts. Oh, you can sleep cozy in your bed no matter where you are, if you have proper bed curtains to shut out the cruel world all about you.

BENNY. A single coin won't manage that, Mrs. Dilber.

DILBER. Don't I know it! I've been saving for years, but every time I get close something happens—some calamity befalls and I have to spend my meagre on something less frivolous. So take it. *(She hands back the coin.)*

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There are those with nothing, and that coin will buy them something for their Christmas table. I shall have to sleep knowing that they are a little better for it, and use that as metaphorical bed curtains.

BENNY. Bless you, Mrs. Dilber.

DILBER. Same atcha.

SCENE 2

Scrooge & Marley's counting house. BOB CRATCHIT works at a small desk, trying to warm his hands with a candle. FRED enters.

FRED. A merry Christmas, Bob Cratchit!

BOB. Why, if it isn't Master Frederick.

FRED. But it is.

BOB. Yes. *(beat.)* Master Frederick—A merry Christmas to you too.

FRED. Is my uncle upon the premises?

BOB. He has stepped out. The widow Samkins is a full two days behind on her payments, and Master Scrooge has gone to her hovel with a cricket bat to convince her to settle her debts more expeditiously in future.

FRED. That seems a trifle harsh.

BOB. I believe he only means to threaten her with it. A preview of coming attractions, as it were.

FRED. Shall I call later?

BOB. To what end?

FRED. Only to wish my dear Uncle the greetings of the season, and to see if he will join my fiancée Clarabelicious Two-Poots and I for dinner upon the morrow.

BOB. I'm sorry—who did you say?

FRED. My uncle. Ebenezer Scrooge—you must know him, he's your boss.

BOB. No, no... your fiancée... Clara...?

FRED. Clarabelicious Two-Poots. Of the Warwickshire Two-Poots.

BOB. That's um... that's an unusual name. I don't recall ever hearing a name like that before.

FRED. Indeed?

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BOB. And it's not a name one would miss, if one perhaps read it somewhere once.

FRED. What are you getting at?

BOB. It's a distinctive name.

FRED. Well quite—a very distinguished family, the Two-Poots.

BOB. So, one might think one would have heard it before.

FRED. Oh, you mean how sometimes you're reading a book, and a quite substantial female character with a certain amount of relevance to the plot is never given a name, but only a relationship to a male character—say, Jim's Mother in *Treasure Island*. Only woman in the entire book, never granted a name, only ever referred to as "Jim's Mother."

BOB. Exactly!

FRED. And who's to say what her name might have been were she to be given one? Anne, possibly.

BOB. Anne is a nice name.

FRED. It is. And my fiancée, who of course does have a name, that is Clarabelicious Snap-trumpet Two-Poots and I intend to invite my uncle for a Christmas dinner.

BOB. You think he will dine with you?

FRED. I do not sustain many illusions to that eventuality—but I believe the asking of it to be sufficient, perhaps, to let him know he is not required to spend Christmas alone and unloved.

BOB. That is the choice he makes, nonetheless. *(Beat.)* You don't ask me.

FRED. You?

BOB. It's fine.

FRED. Well, I had... would you want... I supposed you would spend Christmas with your family.

BOB. Oh, I shall. I was just noticing...

FRED. Noticing...?

BOB. That you didn't ask me. *(Awkward pause.)*

FRED. Mr. Cratchit—Bob—would you care to join Clarabelicious and myself for a quiet family Christmas luncheon... it'll just be the two of us... possibly my uncle. In my personal, private residence.

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BOB. No. But I appreciate being asked.

FRED. Thank goodness. I shall return later to ask the same of my uncle, in anticipation of much the same answer.

BOB. Without the gratitude for it, I am sure.

FRED. There may as yet come a day when he will change, and were I perchance to miss it, or worse arrest it through my own inactions, I would count myself the sorrier for it. I shall return this afternoon.

BOB. I'll still be here, so I shall see you then.

FRED. No half day on Christmas Eve?

BOB. No, thank you so much for bringing it up.

FRED. Well, later then.

BOB. 'til this afternoon. (*As Fred starts to leave, EMILY CRATCHIT enters.*)

BOB. Darling!

FRED. Yes, dear?

BOB. Not you—I was talking to my wife. (*Fred sees Emily.*)

FRED. Ah - you must be Mrs. Cratchit!

EMILY. No, I had a choice! What are you implying?

FRED. Nothing.

EMILY. That I was forced to marry or bear a child out of wedlock?

FRED. Not at all.

EMILY. He was just born early!

BOB. Five months early.

FRED. I bid you good day, Mrs. Cratchit, and many felicitations for the season to you and your exceedingly punctual progeny.

EMILY. I should hope so. (*Fred exits.*) Will there come a day when we are not judged for our too-soon born offspring?

BOB. Perhaps not while Queen Victoria sits upon the throne—but she can't last long, and you and I know the truth of it—and of our twice-cursēd child. But it is so good to see you, dear. Why do you come to my work?

EMILY. It's Tiny Tim.

BOB. Speak of the devil, indeed. Chickens again?

EMILY. Worse. I found bones underneath his bed.

BOB. Bones?

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EMILY. Cats, dogs, goats... gnawed, some of them. The skulls inscribed with eldritch markings, sigils of dark and sinister power.

BOB. Perhaps he practices his letters.

EMILY. Last night, I hid his little crutch, so that he might not go abroad. In the night, I heard a slithering sound—such as made by a creeping figure writhing across the floor, dragging its lame leg o'er the hearth, out the door and into the night. The front door opened and closed, and though I waited for more than an hour, I did not hear it return before I fell asleep into fitful dreaming.

BOB. My sweet wife, you fret so. Tiny Tim is just... a little different than the other children.

EMILY. This morning, I heard the wailing of Agatha Dunstrom, two doors down from us. Her daughter Elspeth was taken from her crib in the night, and her mother is much distraught.

BOB. You don't think—

EMILY. I don't want to think so... but could it be true? *(pause.)*

BOB. No. No, I shall not countenance it. Sweet Tiny Tim would never hurt a soul.

EMILY. Except for those chickens.

BOB. Chickens don't have souls, Emily.

EMILY. And goats. And dogs. Pretty sure dogs have souls.

BOB. This afternoon, I shall ask Mr. Scrooge if I might take the day off tomorrow—for Christmas.

EMILY. That would be most welcome. I don't know how much longer I can stay in that house, trapped with him.

BOB. We shall have a most wondrous feast, and there shall be stockings, and a Christmas goose, and all manner of games and frivolity.

EMILY. Yes, Bob. You're right. It is Christmas, and we shall celebrate as a family, and think no more of such sorrow and despair as Agatha Dunstrom will be having.

BOB. That's the spirit! And a Merry Christmas it shall be!

EBENEZER SCROOGE. *(O.S.)* Merry Christmas?! It is a humbug! Every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips, should be

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boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!

BOB. It's Mister Scrooge! Run!

EMILY. My love! (*She exits.*)

*** [ALTERNATE SCENE ENDING]***

Entirely optional. It adds an additional character—Ebenezer Scrooge—for this one moment. That's a lot of actor and costuming for two seconds, but if you happen to have both on hand, it got a huge laugh in the premiere!

BOB. That's the spirit! And a Merry Christmas it shall be!

EBENEZER SCROOGE. (*O.S.*) Merry Christmas?! It is a humbug!

BOB. It's Mister Scrooge! Run!

EMILY. My love! (*As Emily exits, EBENEZER SCROOGE enters, still yelling at someone on the street.*)

EBENEZER SCROOGE. 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! (*turns to Bob*) Ah, Boh— (*LIGHTS ABRUPTLY OUT, cutting off Scrooge in mid syllable.*)

SCENE 3

Mrs. Dilber's bedchamber. As Mrs. Dilber gets ready for bed, the GHOST OF MARLEY appears, wrapped in the usual chains and lockboxes. Marley swaps between a spooky “ghostly” voice and a more conversational tone as needed.

DILBER. Is someone in my bedchamber? I warn you, I've got mace! (*She pulls out a mace. A spiky one.*)

MARLEY. Mrs. Dilber!

DILBER. Who's that!

MARLEY. Ask me who I was.

DILBER. Who is you was, then?

MARLEY. In life, I was Jacob Marley. Now... I am Jaxob!

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DILBER. Jaxob?

MARLEY. When I was cast into purgatory there was a typo on my admissions paperwork.

DILBER. A typo?

MARLEY. I am doomed to wander the earth as Jaxob!

DILBER. You're dead!

MARLEY. As a doornail, Mrs. Dilber.

DILBER. Dead as a what?

MARLEY. A doornail.

DILBER. Well—what—what? If a doornail can be dead, then that implies it used to have life. I've never seen a living doornail, and I very much doubt you has either.

MARLEY. I have been dead for six long years—

DILBER. Or is there like a larval stage? What is a doornail before it's a doornail, and other such philosophical conundrums.

MARLEY. Will you stop talking about doornails!

DILBER. Will you stop dragging those chains on my floor? I just mopped this morning.

MARLEY. If I only I could, Mrs. Dilber—if only I could! I must go to Ebenezer's bedchamber—

DILBER. I think he's asleep.

MARLEY. I bring him warning.

DILBER. You and the doorknob. Am I going to get any peace tonight?

MARLEY. Unlikely.

DILBER. Might as well make some tea and stay up, then. Fancy a cuppa?

MARLEY. Oh, it goes right through me.

DILBER. *(As she exits.)* So what's this all about?

MARLEY. When I was Jacob—

DILBER. *(O.S.)* Not Jaxob. *(Banging and clattering from off. The noise, which may or may not sound anything at all like tea-making, grows to ridiculous levels: crashes, steam whistles, thunder, chicken noises—have fun.)*

MARLEY. *(over the noises, getting louder)* Not Jaxob, I was partner to Ebenezer. In life, I forged these chains and now I am forced to wear them—

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to wander unceasing these last six years as a formless spirit! I see that Ebenezer forges his own chains, and I shall endeavor to warn him! (*The sounds stop abruptly just as Dilber enters with her tea.*)

DILBER. What about me?

MARLEY. What about you?

DILBER. Do I get chains?

MARLEY. I wouldn't know.

DILBER. Those cash boxes look heavy.

MARLEY. Oh! They are heavy.

DILBER. Pretty full, huh? Yeah, I wouldn't mind having a few cash boxes chained about me so none can steal'em away.

MARLEY. These are my punishment! They are a burden to bear!

DILBER. I notice it's always the rich folk that think having money is a burden.

MARLEY. The poor wouldn't know.

DILBER. S'pose that's true. So, no cash boxes for me, then?

MARLEY. And think yourself the luckier for it!

DILBER. It's not like I was expecting nothing—but it would've been nice to have something. I s'pose I just get a pauper's grave and the eternal void. At least you get out in the fresh air a bit.

MARLEY. What is it that you do you want from your life, Mrs. Dilber? It is not these chains, I assure you.

DILBER. Bed curtains.

MARLEY. Bed curtains?

DILBER. Mr. Scrooge keeps no fires going, the windows are drafty, I sleep down here shivering all night... not so much as a spare blanket. If I had my way, Mr. Marley Ghost, I would have thick velvet curtains around my bed, to draw against the cold of the night. I dream of'em, sometimes. You can keep your cash boxes stuffed wi' riches, and your time off from moldering in a grave—all I ask for is a little bit of drapery around my mattress. Wouldn't have any on you, would you?

MARLEY. Bed curtains?

DILBER. Aye.

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MARLEY. Why would I have bed curtains?

DILBER. I dunno—why 'ave you got chains?

MARLEY. I forged them in life, link by link, and yard by yard... My spirit never walked beyond our counting house, and, if the spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death.

DILBER. So you're saying I should stay in more and forge my own bed curtains?

MARLEY. I don't think that's the takeaway, Mrs. Dilber. Bed curtains are not your business—mankind is your business. Charity, mercy, benevolence—these are the things that should occupy your time, Mrs. Dilber.

DILBER. That and the laundry, and the cleaning and the housekeeping. Ain't got time to forge bed curtains, and ain't got money for the fabric, neither. Don't suppose you can give me one o'them cash boxes?

MARLEY. (*Jealously husbanding the cash boxes.*) I wish I could, Mrs. Dilber.

DILBER. Figured. Ah well—two flights up, second door on the right. 'e's probably got the door to his bedchamber locked, mind.

MARLEY. Not a problem, Mrs. Dilber. Expect the first of the Ghosts at five minutes to midnight.

DILBER. In here?

MARLEY. Yes.

DILBER. You're saying I get ghosts tonight?

MARLEY. Mrs. Dilber, it is imperative that the ghosts arrive in Ebenezer's bed chamber at the stroke of each hour. To be a second early or late ruins the whole effect. If they are to save his soul, it must be exact.

DILBER. With you so far...

MARLEY. So the plan is to turn up five minutes beforehand, and just wait somewhere near, so we can pop out at the correct time.

DILBER. What about turnin' up on the stairs, or in the hallway?

MARLEY. It doesn't work like that. We can only appear before a living soul—you're the closest.

DILBER. So I have to put up with three ghosts, just as a sort of staging area?

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MARLEY. Exactly.

DILBER. That's it, I'm making a whole pot of tea.

SCENE 4

The Cratchit residence. Bob enters.

BOB. My love! I am home!

EMILY. Finally! I was worried, you were so late.

BOB. I stopped on the way back—a troop of stout lads were sliding down Cornhill on a tin tray, and I asked if I might have a go. Full twenty times, my love, I slid down that snowy hill, my cheeks flushed, the air filled with our laughter!

EMILY. You were sledding.

BOB. Yes.

EMILY. While I was worried sick.

BOB. All right, all right. Where are the children? (*MARTHA, PETER and BELINDA enter.*) [*In large cast productions, there might be more children. Maybe dozens of them. They each call "Papa!" as they enter.*]

MARTHA. Papa!

PETER. Papa!

BELINDA. Papa! You're home!

BOB. Belinda! Martha! Peter! [*The other ones!*]

MARTHA. We were worried you were not coming home!

BOB. Never, my loves!

BELINDA. We thought horrid Mister Scrooge had locked you in, to force you to toil all night.

BOB. Nay, sweet child—I was sledding.

BELINDA. Sledding?

BOB. Oh, it would have done your heart good to see it—such laughter! Such fun!

MARTHA. Can we go sledding?

BOB. Why no, child—it is past your bedtime.

MARTHA. I mean, we would have liked to go sledding.

MRS. DILBER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL

PETER. I love sledding.

BELINDA. I've never been sledding.

EMILY. Stop pestering your father—it is past time you lot were in bed, and dreaming of sugar plums.

MARTHA. Oh mother! Will there be sugar plums for breakfast?

EMILY. No.

PETER. Will there be any for Christmas?

EMILY. I wouldn't count on it. Best just to dream of them and be content with that.

BELINDA. I've never had sugar plums. *(A hulking, shambling Mr. Hyde-like monster of a man—TINY TIM— enters. He is misshapen and uses a crutch.)*

EMILY. Tiny Tim! *(The children scream and exit.)*

BOB. Tim!

TINY TIM. Grrrr.

BOB. Oh, sweet child—you should have seen me sledding!

TINY TIM. Grrr.

BOB. If you had a heart, it would have gladdened it.

TINY TIM. Grrr.

EMILY. Tim—it is Christmas Eve. Do you think, maybe, tonight you could stay in and not... *do* anything.

TINY TIM. Grrr. *(Tiny Tim pulls something ragged and bloody from his coat, takes a bite of it and shambles out into the night.)*

BOB. I wish there was some way to help him.

EMILY. Fire?

BOB. Something less drastic.

EMILY. I also, Bob. I also. *(Beat.)* Do you think you should follow him?

BOB. I do not.

EMILY. To see that he doesn't cause—

BOB. Mischief.

EMILY. Mayhem.

BOB. Mayhe—mischief. No, no, I don't think I should do that. *(A long, lingering scream, off.)* The air is quite cold tonight. Perhaps it will snow.

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EMILY. Perhaps. (*The scream fades, followed by a gurgle and a sort of unidentifiable splat noise.*)

BOB. Well, time for bed.

SCENE 5

Mrs. Dilber's bedchamber. THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST appears.

DILBER. Are you the spirit whose coming was foretold?

PAST. I am!

DILBER. You don't look like a ghost.

PAST. What does a ghost look like?

DILBER. You look like a child.

PAST. And you look like an old baggage.

DILBER. None of your cheek!

PAST. I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

DILBER. Long past?

PAST. Scrooge's past.

DILBER. So, it's like personal. Bespoke spiritualism.

PAST. Exactly.

DILBER. Must be nice. Don't have any of my past, do you? ... Nah, who would want to see that. Probably much like Scrooge's—born into poverty, struggle and strife. Not sure I want to see any of it over again, anyway—it was pretty miserable to go through the first time.

PAST. I could only show you Scrooge's past—not much misery or struggle there, though.

DILBER. Really?

PAST. You could see for yourself.

DILBER. Well that's an offer you don't often get, and I'd be a fool to turn it down. Like a magic lantern show, is it?

PAST. What time of the clock is it, Mrs. Dilber?

DILBER. You've got six minutes before midnight, by my reckoning, and eight before Scrooge's clock strikes twelve as he keeps it two minutes late.

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PAST. Oh, I hate that. How is a spirit meant to maintain a proper arrival if people can't even keep their own time straight? Well, take my hand. I guess we have eight minutes to spare. *(Mrs. Dilber takes the Ghost's hand.)*

SCENE 6

A Schoolyard. CHILDREN play the Victorian game "Oranges and Lemons." [More lines from the traditional song may be added if desired.]

CHILDREN. ORANGES AND LEMONS
RING THE BELLS OF ST. CLEMENT'S.
YOU OWE ME FIVE FARTHINGS
RING THE BELLS OF ST. MARTIN'S.
HERE COMES A CANDLE TO LIGHT YOU TO BED.
HERE COMES A CHOPPER TO CHOP OFF YOUR HEAD.
CHIP CHOP CHIP CHOP—THE LAST MAN'S DEAD!

(YOUNG EBENEZER is the last one through the arch, caught on "Dead!")

MEAN CHILD. You're dead, Ebenezer!

MEANER CHILD. You've got no head! You've got no head! *(The Children dance around Ebenezer, sing-singing "You've got no head!" and being the cruel little wretches children are. [For an ensemble, era appropriate lines maybe added for some of them: Jolterhead! Tatterdemallion! Who's your tailor, your underbutler? or just the perennial favorite: You smell like poo!])* The Children run off, laughing. *Young Ebenezer weeps.)*

DILBER. Oh, it does you good to see littl'uns playing so. We used to play that when I was a wee lass, but ours pretended more gore and guts in it. Proper hanged, drawn and quartered. Now it's just a decapitation—they do sanitize for the kiddies these days. Who's the little squirt with the sniffles?

PAST. Can you not guess? This is the past of Ebenezer Scrooge.

DILBER. That little thing? Left behind by his schoolmates?

PAST. He has few friends.

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DILBER. Maybe I should go and, you know... give him a clip around the earhole, tell him to straighten up and stop sniveling.

PAST. Really?!

DILBER. Look at this place! Fancy school, fine clothes—that shirt is hand-tailored, and for a wee'un that'll outgrow it in six months, you tell me it isn't. He's never gone hungry a day in his life. He don't have to work in a cotton mill, choking on the the loom dust, and I was younger than'im.

“Ooh, poor me, I ain't got no friends.” I wanna give him such a smack.

PAST. These are but shadows of the things that have been—your hand would pass right through him.

DILBER. There's always a loophole. *(She yells at Young Ebenezer.)* 'Ere! You stuffed up jammie little bastard! *[alt: You stuffed up jammie little bantling!]* How about appreciating how good you 'as it instead of whinging? You want friends, go make some—you ain't got work to do! *(Showing her arm.)* You see this scar? Six years old, I was a mule scavenger, crawling under a working loom to keep the wheelgate clean. I didn't get flat quick enough when the loom carriage went over me head, and that machine ripped me arm to the bone. What did I get? The chargehand beat me 'coz my blood ruined three yards of fabric! *(YOUNG BELLE enters.)*

YOUNG BELLE. Ebenezer!

YOUNG EBENEZER. Belle!

YOUNG BELLE. I am sorry that your parents did not arrive to collect you from school, but Papa has said you can come and share Christmas at our house! We will have cakes and sugar plums and candy ribbons and sweets of all kinds! Our cook is the best cook ever, and all the kitchen staff have been making their best efforts for a true winter feast! Come! We will have so much fun! *(Young Belle and Young Ebenezer run off.)*

DILBER. Cor blimey, would you believe it. It makes me want to spit. That's his past, is it?

PAST. Some of it. Would you like to see how it turns out?

DILBER. I don't know. Is it likely to put me in a better humor?

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PAST. I'm not sure. I'm starting to wonder if it was right to bring you to see someone else's journey of redemption.

DILBER. Well, I'm interested now. What turned him from a child of privilege into the miserly wretch we all know and hate?

PAST. Come. I will show you those two after they have spent ten Christmases together.

SCENE 7

A manor house. Mrs. Dilber and the Ghost of Christmas Past appear. 18-year-old SCROOGE and 18-year-old BELLE meet.

SCROOGE. Mistress Belle!

BELLE. Master Scrooge! You came!

SCROOGE. Would I miss Christmas at the home of my dearest... friend?

BELLE. I am glad, Ebenezer. Look how you've grown!

SCROOGE. You too, sweet Belle. You've become... quite the young woman.

BELLE. Oh. There's punch in the other room. And you must give your welcome to my parents.

SCROOGE. I shall do that. I wish to speak to your father particularly.

BELLE. You do?

SCROOGE. I believe so. *(Scrooge exits.)*

DILBER. Well, that's going to crash and burn.

PAST. They seem quite fond of each other.

DILBER. Yeah, but we know he ends up alone, so... bit of a spoiler.
(Belle's sister ABIGAIL enters.)

BELLE. Abigail!

ABIGAIL. Did I hear the front door?

BELLE. Yes, Ebenezer is here!

ABIGAIL. Again.

BELLE. I was worried he might have made other plans this year.

ABIGAIL. Not likely. That lad is truly smitten.

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BELLE. I believe he might be asking Father for my hand. I think he intends to propose, dear sister.

ABIGAIL. Propose? Marriage?

BELLE. Yes. *(Ebenezer enters, carrying two glasses of punch.)*

ABIGAIL. Have you quite thought this out? *(Ebenezer freezes, unseen.)*

BELLE. What do you mean?

ABIGAIL. Is that a name that can be murmured with love? Oh kiss me, my darling... Ebenezer. Hold me, touch me... Ebenezer. Is that a name one might call out in passion? Oh yes, yes, yes! Take me, take me now...

Ebeneezer. Ew. *[alt: Is that a name that can be murmured with love? Oh take my hand... Ebenezer. Hold me close... Ebenezer. Kiss me, kiss me my darling... Ebeneezer. Ew.]*

BELLE. I see your point. I hadn't considered. *(She giggles.)* It would be... I shouldn't laugh!

ABIGAIL. Ebenezer! You're so... manly! *(They laugh. Ebenezer runs off.)*

DILBER. Oh, for pity's sake, I tell you, these rich folks have so little worries they make a tiny drop of trouble into a storm that sinks'em. Call him Ben! *(to Past)* Take me home, for I'm sick of'em and their petty troubles.

PAST. One more stop—you must meet Master Fezziwig!

DILBER. Oh, 'coz there's a name that can be called out in passion. *[alt: Oh, 'coz there's a name that can be murmured with love.]*

SCENE 8

The Fezziwig factory. MR. FEZZIWIG and his apprentices Scrooge and WILL WILKINS prepare for a Christmas party.

FEZZIWIG. Yo ho, my boys! No more work tonight. Christmas Eve, Will Wilkins! Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up before a man can say Jack Robinson!

SCROOGE. Jack Robinson! *(They all laugh.)*

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FEZZIWIG. Hilli-ho! Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Will! Giddy up, Ebenezer! (*Enter MRS. FEZZIWIG, and various PARTY-GOERS. They dance.*)

PAST. You know this music?

DILBER. Sir Roger de Coverly? I might'a been poor, but there's none so poor that they don't like a good tune! (*Mrs. Dilber joins the dance—whirling in and out among the dancers before collapsing next to Past again.*)

DILBER. Oh, that takes me right back it does.

PART GOER 1. Three cheers for Mr. Fezziwig!

PARTY GOER 2. And Mrs. Fezziwig!

PARTY GOER 3. Founders of the feast!

ALL. Huzzah! Huzzah! Huzzah!

MR. FEZZIWIG. Enough dancing! Time to eat!

MRS. FEZZIWIG. It's always time to eat, with you!

MR. FEZZIWIG. To the feast! (*They all exit except Dilber and Past.*)

DILBER. A feast, too?

PAST. Not for us, Mrs. Dilber.

DILBER. Cor, how much does this cost?

PAST. A small sum, to make these happy folks so full of gratitude.

DILBER. Small?

PAST. A few pounds of your mortal money: three or four, perhaps. Only Ebenezer would countenance it ill spent to garner so much praise, to foment so much joy. Although, I think when I show him—

DILBER. But it's not about the money. This Fezziwig has the power to render his employees happy or unhappy; to make their service light or burdensome. Is this brief respite from their labor suffice for a year of toil?

PAST. He is a good employer.

DILBER. But is it right for the whim of an employer to make his worker's lives a misery or not?

PAST. He acquits himself admirably.

DILBER. It might be. At the cotton mill, on Christmas Eve, much the same happened. The owner would stand with his avaricious, port-swilling wife, and they would smile and lord over us, while we got a piece of

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barley-cake and watered down negus... and many of us children would sneak that little piece of cake into our pockets to bring home for our parents who had nothing. And we would have that brief respite, and know that when we come back, there would be nothing but more toil, and more children losing fingers or worse to the implacable machines. Shall I take your hand, young ghost, and show you my past? *(She shows her scar.)* Would you count the cost of a few pounds so little when each ha'penny of it was gained by the toil of the downtrodden?

PAST. You sound like young Scrooge himself.

DILBER. Oh I does, does I?

PAST. Come see for yourself.

SCENE 9

A manor house. Dilber and Past watch Belle and Scrooge.

BELLE. I shall not wed you, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE. It's my name, isn't it.

DILBER. Try "Ben"!

BELLE. It's not that, sweet Ben.

DILBER. There you go!

BELLE. Another idol has displaced me in your affections.

SCROOGE. What idol has displaced you?

BELLE. A golden one. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master passion, Gain, engrosses you.

SCROOGE. Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I strive and toil for every ha'penny of wealth so that we may live together in comfort—so that I may keep you in such circumstances as you deserve. I am not changed towards you.

BELLE. Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor, and content to be so.

DILBER. Poor? You think you were poor?

SCROOGE. I was a boy then.

DILBER. A rich boy! Poor—she honestly thinks—

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BELLE. I would gladly think otherwise if I could! If you were free today, can I even believe that you would choose a dowerless girl—do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I release you, Ebenezer. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were. May you be happy in the life you have chosen! (*Belle runs off. Scrooge starts after her—then turns away.*)

SCROOGE. (*turning bitter*) Love... 'tis a humbug!

DILBER. Oh, he can't win for old cheese.

PAST. He chose riches over love.

DILBER. She thinks they were poor, because—what? The house that they live in—a good house, a fine house—is slightly smaller than the mansion of her parents? They don't understand nothin 'about the wealth they already have, do they? (*A clock strikes midnight.*)

PAST. That clock!

DILBER. What's the matter?

PAST. My time grows short! Quick!

DILBER. You got two minutes—his clock runs slow. No, stay a moment, I tell a lie. Fast, his clock runs fast so as he can get to work early and scream at Bob Cratchit for dawdling.

PAST. I have missed the midnight hour?

DILBER. So, turn up a bit late.

PAST. I missed my appointment! Take my hand!

SCENE 10

Mrs. Dilber's bedchamber.

DILBER. And we're back again.

PAST. I missed my appointment!

DILBER. Don't fret so—it's not grave, you're a few minutes late.

PAST. I was meant to arrive at midnight!

DILBER. You're the Ghost of Christmas Past, just tell him that... you can only turn up in the past, so you have to wait until the hour has just gone or something. Use your wits, child.

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PAST. I can't be late. It doesn't work if I'm late.

DILBER. Give this to your granny for sixpence—who's going to know if you just give it a miss?

PAST. Give it a miss?

DILBER. You're the ghost of Ebenezer's past—he knows all you were going to show him, he was there the first time. Of the three ghosts, you're the most useless.

PAST. And you eat vinegar with a fork!

DILBER. Least I'm honest. Tell you what, first thing in the morning, I'll bring his breakfast up to 'im, and I'll say: Ere! Ebenezer—you remember when you was a wee'un at school and fell for that young miss and were all set to marry her? And he'll say: Oh right... Belle, that was her name, and she dumped me because I was a self-centered greed-monger. And I'll say: Yeah, you pissed in your own porridge on that one, din'cha? [*alt: Yeah, you poked your own eye on that one, din'cha?*] And that should do it.

PAST. You'd do that for me?

DILBER. Consider it done, with my thanks for lettin 'me have a dance at that party, even if I couldn't pick up any of the drinks. I thank'ee spirit, and hope you have an 'appy haunting wherever you are off to next.

PAST. My time is done, Mrs. Dilber. I am only of the past, and I grow old as we reach the now.

DILBER. It's now, ain't it? (*Past vanishes. A pause.*) So I'll just stay here and wait for the next one, shall I?

**(If an INTERMISSION is desired,
this is when it should occur.)**

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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