

Cratchit

A play, adapted from the novel,
by David Jacklin

7th draught

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

A NARRATOR

Robert **CRATCHIT**, a clerk
Ebenezer **SCROOGE**, a rich man
John Mead Cratchit, a costermonger
Maria Cratchit, his wife
BOBBY Cratchit, their son
Costers and street vendors
Mr. **LATIMER**, a hard-working young man
'Graveyard' Walker, the parish doctor
Sir William Jenner, Bart., K. C. B., M. D., an esteemed physician
KITTY Fisher, a street walker
Jem **STITCHER**, her pimp
MRS. CRATCHIT (Anne), married to Robert
Elsie, a maid at the Millers
FRED Miller, Scrooge's nephew
MRS. FRED (Norah) Miller, his wife
A street urchin
The Artful **DODGER** (Jack Dawkins), a boy of the street
Three charitable gentlemen, of the work-house
A not-so charitable teacher, of the 'voluntary' school
Old **JOE**, a long-time hardened criminal
The **BADGER**, a violent criminal, assistant to Old Joe
MARTHA Cratchit, the Cratchit's eldest
Mr. Gadsby, an ironmonger
Mr. Tysoe, a neighbour of Cratchit and a debtor
Two charitable gentlemen, collecting money for Christmas
A gang of street urchins, from the 'Saffron Hill' gang
A Cabman
Various girls and women of the street, working in Baldwin's Gardens
Tom, a delivery man
TIM Cratchit, a tiny boy
A Priest at St. Pancras Old Church
The Landlord of the Red Lion
Lushin' Loo, a working woman at the Red Lion
Three Peelers, of the Metropolitan Police
An unseen Voice, who works for Old Joe

THE SETTING

The streets and various places in London, England.
Mostly in 1835, but also 1805-1812

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CRATCHIT

A play based on the novel

Act One

NARRATOR: The intelligent reader, such as yourself, will know, from Mister Dickens's rather whimsical and quite fantastical telling of the tale of *that* Christmas, that Marley was dead. Far be it from me, dear reader, to contradict Boz on that or, indeed, on any detail. It is quite true: Marley had been dead for seven long years.

That thought came, unbidden, into the mind of Bob Cratchit while holding his frigid fingers toward the candle which lighted his small cubicle.

Bob Cratchit, to look at, was nothing to look at. You could find any number of him on any street in London and you would never spare any of them a glance, either.

He habitually wore as large a smile as his face would accommodate, not from any particular good-humour, but because he had found it the best way to forestall ill-humour in others.

In truth, Robert Cratchit was ... nobody. He was born nobody and, to any unprejudiced observer, it seemed likely that he would die nobody. Which brought Cratchit full circle.

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ALL: Marley was dead.

NARRATOR: Scrooge & Marley, together, had been hard taskmasters; Scrooge, alone, was near to unendurable.

Cratchit had married pretty, buxom Anne at nineteen, and the first child had arrived not many months after (how many months, I will not enumerate, as tongues do wag).

Martha, the eldest, worked for a milliner in Stepney, living above her mistress's shop but five other children continued to be hungry and cold – and sick.

That thought ... and a growl from Scrooge ... made Cratchit dip his nib into the ink-well and get to work. How to describe Ebenezer Scrooge? It was most people's opinion that, no matter how old he actually was ...

ALL: ... he looked older than he was.

NARRATOR: His nose and his lips were blue; his eyes were perpetually red; his cheeks

were hollowed shadows.

The clock in Scrooge's room struck the hour with a whir and a clang. Scrooge closed his ledger with a BANG and snuffed his candle with a HISS. Cratchit groped his way to the centre of the office.

SCROOGE: December twenty-third.

CRATCHIT: Tomorrow, sir, yes.

SCROOGE: Three loans due on the twenty-fourth: Tysoe, Latimer, Miller. Have a letter of complaint ready drawn up for each of them. Remind them of their obligations. Go around and see each of them in the morning.

CRATCHIT: Before nine a.m., sir? I'd have to walk out there in the dark, sir.

SCROOGE: Business does not stop for darkness, Cratchit. Be here by nine. And, put the cash into the lock box before you go.

NARRATOR: Scrooge pushed his topper down and Cratchit watched him go.

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CRATCHIT: Yes, Mr. Scrooge. I'll walk to Bethnal Green in the dark, Mr. Scrooge. Perhaps you'd like me to walk to bleeding Ireland, too, Mr. Scrooge!

NARRATOR: Aware that he had spoken aloud, Cratchit checked the back door, saw the fires were out, copied the addresses he must visit next morning onto a slip of paper. The safe was rusted and creaked as he forced it open.

ALL: SCREEEEEE!

NARRATOR: The strong box was crammed with papers. At the bottom of the pile, a twice folded document closed with a notary's seal. It bore the words:

ALL: LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF EBENEZER SCROOGE

NARRATOR: Outdated papers went onto the open shelves, the remainder in the lock box, cash box on top, the Last Will And Testament Of Ebenezer Scrooge on the bottom. He forced the lock box closed –

ALL: SCREEEEEE!

NARRATOR: – locked the door to the counting-house, and exited to the courtyard.

The streets of London were dark this night, but that was nothing unusual

for him. His earliest remembrances were of dark London streets. It is a Saturday night market in London. Every stall has a row of candles; a string of hanging tapers; the atmosphere is as lurid as if the street were on fire. It is a carnival – a fair.

2nd MAN: Tour-on-nops! Here ya want! Tour-on-nops!

2nd WOMAN: Penny a lot, fine russets, yannep a lot

3rd WOMAN: Fine warnuts! sixteen a penny, fine war-r-nuts.

1st MAN: Now's your time! Beautiful whelks, a penny a lot. New Wall-fleet oysters.

NARRATOR: John Cratchit and his wife were costermongers, like thousands in London.

1st WOMAN: Beautiful whelks, yannep a lot. Wall-fleet oysters! What d'ye buy?

NARRATOR: They were fish-mongers and proud of it – wasn't Jesus a fisherman?

1st WOMAN: John! She'll take ha'p'orth o' the oyster! Pawr 'em up! There you goes, missus. Oysters – new Wall-fleet oysters!

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NARRATOR: Beneath his father's barrow, little Bobby Cratchit's head fell against the wheel of the barrow and he slept. And came awake to screams, shouts, and the barrow wheel striking him to the cobbles and slamming down again in a shower of whelks and oysters.

2nd MAN: Hold him down, there! Hold him!

3rd MAN: Catch his head!

2nd WOMAN: Watch the hooves! Take care!

4th MAN: Cut that trace, there!

3rd WOMAN: Lift it off her! Lift now!

THE MEN: Ho! Ho! Ho!

NARRATOR: A crashing, crunching sound and the arms holding Bobby said ...

1st MAN: You're all right, lad. You're all right, son.

4th WOMAN: Is she hurt?

2nd MAN: She's dead, I think.

2nd WOMAN: Cool t'ow. Reeh's the yoib.

NARRATOR: The 'yoib', born a coster himself, understood her backslang perfectly –

2nd WOMAN: Look out. Here's the boy.

3rd MAN: Cratchit! Here's the boy.

NARRATOR: Bobby's father held him tightly, but never looked to him. When Bobby looked where his father was looking, he saw ...

3rd WOMAN: ... their barrow, broken and shattered ...

4th MAN: ... their wares trampled underfoot ...

NARRATOR: ... his mother, her red dress the centre of a widening pool of red. The babble around him slowly resumed, drifting away from the circle.

2nd WOMAN: Pippins, fine eating pippins!

3rd WOMAN: Fair lemons and oranges!

NARRATOR: Days came; days went. Seasons passed – and Robert Cratchit had just removed the key from the lock of Scrooge & Marley's front door. A young man, coat-tails flying, came pelting around the corner, skidding slightly on the freshly frosted cobbles, to halt before Scrooge & Marley's.

LATIMER: Has Mister Scrooge gone, then?

NARRATOR: Though winded, his voice was strong and clear.

CRATCHIT: A few minutes gone.

LATIMER: Latimer's my name.

CRATCHIT: Oh! You've run from Bethnal Green, Mister Latimer?

LATIMER: We'll not have the payment. We can have it by Tuesday week, sir. It's just, the baby's been ill, sir, and with medicines ...

CRATCHIT: I understand, Mister Latimer. But Mister Scrooge will not. He has never *not* met his obligations – to the letter. He's no sympathy – for anyone.

LATIMER: But ... surely, if you explain to him ...

CRATCHIT: I have a sick child, too.

LATIMER: Of course. Of course. Thank you, sir.

NARRATOR: Cratchit watched the defeated figure move off into the gloom.

CRATCHIT: Mister Latimer! Miracles can happen! He may have a change of heart, yet!

NARRATOR: The squeal of rusted metal came from the shadowed sign above the door.

ALL: Scrooge & Marley.

CRATCHIT: Scrooge and Marley. At least Marley, the old goat, had the grace to die. Why can't Mister Scrooge be so graceful?

NARRATOR: Cratchit turned up his collar and turned his face toward Camden Town. He paid little attention to the way home. Instead, he thought of Latimer's child and his own desperately-ill boy. By his sixth birthday, Tim could no longer run and sat quietly by the fire. 'Graveyard Walker', the parish doctor, a mere surgeon rather than a grand *Medicine Doctor*, pronounced his opinion on young Tim.

2nd MAN: Graveyard miasma, mark my word.

MRS. CRATCHIT: But what do we do with our Tim?

NARRATOR: 'Graveyard Walker' pulled at his thin lip as he considered the verdict.

2nd MAN: Nothing to be done. The graveyard miasma. It will be what it will be.

NARRATOR: It took another year and every farthing they could scrape together to gain admission to Sir William Jenner, Bart., K.C. B., M.D.

3rd MAN: It's the fogs, of course. The fogs are to blame. Keep him out of the fogs. The fogs are to blame. Fogs and dissipation!

NARRATOR: The Doctor, in unqualified disapproval of fogs, dissipation and the child, hurried away, his boots creaking in an important and wealthy manner.

As I noted, Cratchit was trusting to his feet on his way home that night, and, somewhere before St. Pancras, he found that he had gone astray. The street was narrow. The buildings threatened imminent collapse despite the

fact that they had clearly been there since time immemorial.

KITTY: Hello, captain. Looking for a friend, are you? I could be your friend. Me name's Kitty. Willin' Kitty, they calls me. Shillin'?

CRATCHIT: I just need to get to High Street.

KITTY: I knows High Street. But it'll cost you. Shillin'.

CRATCHIT: No. *(Cratchit tips his hat.)* Good evening to you.

KITTY: Ooh, 'Good evenin'! Don't 'e 'alf bubble-around? *(She grabs his wrist.)* What say, captain, you gets your shillin's worth and then I shows you to High Street? Sound good, eh?

CRATCHIT: Thank you, no. I'll find my own way. *(He releases his hand.)*

KITTY: I don't think so, captain. It's an Abra'am, either way.

CRATCHIT: I do not have a shilling! Now, let me be! *(She grabs him.)* Are you mad?

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KITTY: Listen, captain, if I doesn't go back shillin' in hand, Stitche-ll lays a batty-fang on youse, proper.

CRATCHIT: Stitche?

KITTY: Don't ask. Give us a shillin', love, and we can be friends.

CRATCHIT: I haven't a shilling!

KITTY: Don't sell me a dog! Toff like you? Shillin' now or shillin' when Jem takes it. It's much nicer this way. *(CRATCHIT pushes her away.)* STITCHER! JEM!

NARRATOR: A great shadow fell on Cratchit and a hand hurled him toward the darkness. A deep, grating voice rolled over the sudden silence.

JEM: What's all this collie-shangles, then? What are you about, eh?

CRATCHIT: I'm simply trying to go home.

JEM: Where's home, then?

CRATCHIT: Camden Town.

JEM: What are you a-doing here, bothering of my Kitty?

CRATCHIT: I simply asked the way to High Street.

JEM: That right, Kitty? He wanted to go to High Street?

KITTY: Oh, no, Jem! He had his daddles all over me!

JEM: You put hands on my Kitty, you little gigglemug?

CRATCHIT: No, sir. I certainly did not.

KITTY: Ah-ah-ah-ow! He were a-pawing of me, Jem! Oh, the things he wanted me to be a-doing! Shocking, it were!

JEM: Shocking, were it? I hain't seen Kitty shocked since she were twelve year old. What kind of nose bagger are you?

KITTY: I think he's a mutton shunter, Jem. Trying to trap innocent girls like me!

JEM: Are you, chuckaboo? Are you a peeler? Getting girls to say things they oughtn't and hauling them before the beak? Cause I don't like peelers.

CRATCHIT: I'm a clerk, sir. Just a clerk. With a lending firm. In the City.

JEM: What lending firm?

CRATCHIT: I'd rather not say, sir.

JEM: I'd rather you did. What firm!

CRATCHIT: Scrooge and Marley.

JEM: Skrudge and Morley. Where's that?

CRATCHIT: In Newman's Court, sir.

JEM: And what's your name, flapdoodle? What's your name!

KITTY: Wait, Stitcher! Look in his topper!

JEM: What do you mean?

KITTY: A toff like that will have his name written in his topper. They always do.

JEM: *(Snatches CRATCHIT's hat.)* There's scribbling here, right enough.

KITTY: Well, what's it say, Jem? *(JEM strikes KITTY with the hat.)* Owwww! Jemmie! What'd you want to do that for? I didn't do nothing!

JEM: You knows I can't makes out words, girl.

CRATCHIT: You can't read?

JEM: I can read! I just can't makes out words, that's all. What's it say, Kitty?

KITTY: It says 'Praw ... properly ... property! of ... robber ... Robert ... Crack ... it ... Crat ... Crat-chit! Property of Robert Cratchit – Camden Town!'

JEM: Right, Scratchit. You owes Kitty a shilling for fumbling under her skirts ...

CRATCHIT: But, I didn't!

JEM: Shut your blooming bib! A shilling for the fumble. Plus a shilling for all them shocking things you wanted her to be a-doing. And an Abra'am for making me leave me supper and come out in the cold. So, that's three shillings, innit? But, I tell you what, Robert Scratchit. I likes you, I do, so I'll knocks off a tanner and make it half a crown. Give. Well? Come on! Half a crown! *(JEM shakes him again.)* Let's see it! Does you knows what they calls me, chuckaboo? Does you?

CRATCHIT: Stitcher.

JEM: That's right. I stitches 'em up. Rather, I makes the holes for the stitches. I hopes, for your sake, you comes up with half a crown.

CRATCHIT: Sir. I have no money. None.

JEM: *(To KITTY.)* Hain't that just bang up to the elephant?

KITTY: He told me at first that he hadn't no shilling, Jem. He did.

JEM: Then what are you a-wasting of my time with him for?

KITTY: I thought you'd scare it out of him! Don't hit me, Jem! Please!

JEM: I hain't going to hit you. But, what am I going to do with him?

CRATCHIT: You needn't do anything, sir. I don't know who you are or where I am.

JEM: You knows Kitty's name; you knows my moniker. Put 'em together and the peelers'll have me in chokey quick as tanter go and no jaffa.

CRATCHIT: Please! I have a family – a wife, children.

JEM: A fambly? Don't we all? I gots a wife – three or four on 'em. But that don't change nothing. Am I supposed to let yous off so's every villain around will knows you can make a right gardens out of Sticher and gets away with it?

KITTY: Jem! *(Puts her hand on his arm.)* Don't kill him! He didn't do nothing!

JEM: He should have! See that, chuckaboo? That's my needle. For stitching up people like yous.

KITTY: You don't gots to kill him, Jem!

JEM: I don't gots to, but I think I'm going to.

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1st WOMAN: Cratchit, unable to move, stared with open horror at the point.

1st MAN: Jem tensed and the dagger drew back an inch.

2nd WOMAN: Kitty opened her mouth to shriek.

CRATCHIT: I know how to get you money!

(A silence, then JEM relaxes slightly.)

JEM: How much money?

CRATCHIT: A considerable sum.

JEM: A what?

KITTY: He means lots, Jem.

JEM: Then why don't he say so? Where might this 'considerable sum' be?

CRATCHIT: At my place of employment, sir. Scrooge and Marley's, sir.

JEM: In Newman's Court?

CRATCHIT: Yes, sir.

JEM: Let's go get it, chuckaboo.

CRATCHIT: It's not there, now.

JEM: When's it going to be there?

CRATCHIT: On Christmas Eve.

KITTY: Hear him out, Jem! Tell him why it won't be there until Christmas Eve!

CRATCHIT: Because ... Mister Scrooge deposits it the day after it comes in, but that's Christmas. So the money will be in the safe until the day *after* Christmas.

JEM: So, Christmas Eve, we just toddles up the frog, kicks in the rory ...

CRATCHIT: No! Not the road. And don't kick in the door. The *back* door will be open, and Mister Scrooge's office door and the safe.

JEM: How does you knows that?

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CRATCHIT: Because I've got the knobblies. I can leave the doors open – and the safe.

JEM: So, we get into Mister Scrawge's office – and how much is lying there?

CRATCHIT: *(Doing sums in his head.)* About two hundred pounds.

KITTY: Two hundred quid! Let's do it, Jem!

JEM: Naw. We sit on him for two days, his cows and kisses will have the peelers'll looking for him. We lets him go, he'll pitch to the peelers, sure.

CRATCHIT: I can't go the peelers!

KITTY: We knows his name – Robert Cratchit. We knows where he works – Scrooge and Marley, Newman's Court. And, where the cows and kisses lives, don't we, Bobby? I said, 'DON'T WE!' *(CRATCHIT nods.)*

JEM: Right then, sees him to High Street – and all the way to the gates of Rome. I wants to know which rat and mouse he lives at. And you still owes me a shilling, tonight. *(He kicks at his dog.)* Come on, you. We got a nice bit of kate'n'sidney waiting.

NARRATOR: On High Street, Cratchit tried his best to leave her behind. He had no wish for Jem to learn the whereabouts of Castle Cratchit. Small and unassuming as it may be, it was his home.

KITTY: Here, captain! Hang about! My legs hain't so long as yours!

NARRATOR: After the fourth turning, she lifted her skirts and, showing a shocking amount of boots and limbs, and a surprising amount of speed, she pulled ahead, turned about and placed a hand on his chest.

KITTY: Look, Bobby. Sticher wants to know where you live, and, if I don't want a hiding, it had better be all Irish what I gives him.

KITTY: You doesn't know him, Bobby. He's right wicked, and if he thinks you've crossed him ... He's friends with a old tiddler down Saffron Hill and *he's* got little spies – horrid little bleeders. He'd find you, sure, Bobby.

CRATCHIT: Past St. Pancras, Fig Lane, Gloucester Place, Bayham Street. Number 16.

KITTY: See, that wasn't so hard. Let's go, then.

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CRATCHIT: You don't trust me?

KITTY: Old friends like us? Step out, now. It's a cold night and – as you know, Bobby, 'cause I seen you looking – I hain't wearing no pantaloons. (*They walk.*) I never been in this kind of borough before. Not with proper houses and such. Not with toffs like you living in 'em, Mister Cratchit.

CRATCHIT: Have you never been out of Islington before?

KITTY: Islington? I'm from the Angel. It's where I was born. It's where I'll die.

CRATCHIT: Ah. (*They walk.*) How did you come to be ... walking the streets, Kitty?

KITTY: You want to hear my pathetic story, does you? (*Melodramatically.*) 'Oh, I'm a tragically seduced milliner!' (*She drops the melodrama.*) I went to one o' them 'Save your soul' places, oncet. The bastards. They threw me back out onto the street! Jemmie took me in.

CRATCHIT: You need to get away from him, Kitty.

KITTY: Who else is going to take care of little Kitty Fisher? 'Sides, I loves him. (*They stop walking.*) This it? Well, I won't come up.

CRATCHIT: Goodbye. *(He turns away.)*

KITTY: Oi! Bobby! We're mates, right? See, I gots a shillin' what Jem don't be knowing of, so's, if yous wants to, there's a lovely dark spot over there.

NARRATOR: The door to Number 16 closed with a bang!

MRS. CRATCHIT: Is that you, Robert? You're late, today. Robert, what it is? Are you ill? What is it?

CRATCHIT: The way home ... well, dear, like the Prodigal Son, I fell in among thieves.

MRS. CRATCHIT: That was the Good Samaritan, Robert.

CRATCHIT: It doesn't matter. I was on my way home, and I took a wrong turning. And found myself alone, somewhere in the Angel.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Oh, Robert!

CRATCHIT: The very worst of them; a great brute known – I swear it is true, Anne – as Stitcher, demanded money which, of course, I didn't have. I talked my way out. Yes, that was it. I talked my way out.

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MRS. CRATCHIT: Then we needn't think of it again. You'd best have a wash up before your supper. You've got the smell of the Angel on you – if I didn't know better, I'd swear it were penny-a-bottle rose-water.

NARRATOR: Rose-water, and stale beer, and – gin, perhaps. The smell brought a memory: a dirty room, a drunken man.

2nd MAN: Come, Cratchit! Look at me, man!

3rd MAN: Come now, Mister Cratchit! Pull yourself up! Call upon the Lord!

CRATCHIT: What's that! Who's there?

2nd MAN: Cratchit, we spoke of this. The parish will take your boy. Do you remember that?

CRATCHIT: Take my boy? What do you mean?

2nd MAN: Cratchit, you've signed the paper.

CRATCHIT: I remember. You'll take care of him? I remember. Bobby! Come here, boy.

3rd MAN: God be thanked.

NARRATOR: Bobby was not much taller than he had been. His clothes were more ragged; his frame a little thinner. He smiled his broadest smile at them.

BOBBY: Am I to go with them?

CRATCHIT: I can't help you. You can't help yourself. This is the way. Go with them.

BOBBY: Where am I going, sir?

3rd MAN: To a place where you will learn many things and become a good Christian.

BOBBY: Shall I see my father, again, sir?

3rd MAN: Of course, my boy. Of course.

NARRATOR: But he never did. Not from that day to this. The smell of cooking was rising from the kitchen. Belinda and Peter pushed in, fresh from the baker with a tup'ny loaf, Tim in royal comfort on his brother's shoulder.

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PETER: He's getting so big, father. It's all I can do to carry him.

NARRATOR: This was patently false: Tim was so small that thoughtless people often called him Tiny Tim, as if names do not hurt.

CRATCHIT: He is, my boy. Just look at the colour in his cheeks!

NARRATOR: Any colour in Tim's cheeks was overlaid with pallor.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Supper's on, father. Come along, Peter. Where are the twins?

NARRATOR: It was a three-course meal – if you accounted the vegetables, the mutton, and the bread separately. After there was no money for candles to keep out the darkness and, besides, they had all to be up before first light.

CRATCHIT: I've realised I don't have to go out to Bethnal Green in the morning, dear. I spoke with the man while I was closing up. Goodnight.

MRS. CRATCHIT: You might tell me why you came in smelling of rose-water and beer, Bob.

CRATCHIT: Rose-water and beer. Ah, well. When I had taken my wrong turns, a woman accosted me. I tried to rebuff her and she called Sticher. He had

partaken of strong waters and that must be why I smelt of beer. He said, if I didn't pay him half-a-crown, he'd 'stitch' me.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Surely he wasn't in earnest?

CRATCHIT: The knife was not an inch from me, but I persuaded him not to do it.

MRS. CRATCHIT: However did you do that?

CRATCHIT: I appealed to his greed. Christmas Eve, there will be two hundred pounds in Mister Scrooge's safe. I'm to leave the doors and the safe open for them.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Robert! They could hang you or transport you.

CRATCHIT: He'd have killed me, Anne. He has spies – children, running the streets. They spy for him, steal for him; Lord knows what else they do for him.

MRS. CRATCHIT: What? A gang of children running the streets of London, committing crimes? Who'd believe a story like that?

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CRATCHIT: Kitty swears it is true.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Oh, it's 'Kitty', is it?

CRATCHIT: All will be fine if Stitcher gets his two hundred pounds on Christmas Eve.

MRS. CRATCHIT: *(After a pause.)* If you hadn't told him how much there'd be, Bob, we might have gotten some it for ourselves. A bit extra, you know.

NARRATOR: But, where would a man like Robert Cratchit, a faceless nobody of a man like Robert Cratchit, find himself a bit extra?

CRATCHIT: *(Nearly asleep.)* Oh, and I found Mister Scrooge's will, today, as well.

NARRATOR: Candles lit the home of Mister Frederick Miller. There was even a real oil lamp shining through the window. He knocked, the door opened, and he looked down to find a face.

4th WOMAN: Yes, sir? May I help you, sir?

CRATCHIT: I've come from the firm of Scrooge and Marley.

4th WOMAN: To see Mister Miller, is that it?

FRED: What's this? Scrooge and Marley sending to me? Bless me! Mister Cratchit?

CRATCHIT: Good heavens! Mister Scrooge, sir?

FRED: Oh, dear! That's the first time anyone's mistaken me for my uncle! Ha, ha, ha! HA, ha, ha, ha! I do not carry the family name. I thank my cards. Do come in, sir. Come in! I assume this is about the loan. Due tomorrow, isn't it?

CRATCHIT: Yes, sir. That is, yes, it's about the loan and, yes, it's due tomorrow.

MRS. FRED: Fred, dear, will you be ... oh! Good morning. I do beg your pardon! Fred, I wanted to ask you to hook me up.

FRED: My dear, Mister Cratchit, an esteemed employee of my Uncle Scrooge.

MRS. FRED: Delighted to meet you, Mister Cratchit.

FRED: Mister Cratchit, my wife.

MRS. FRED: So, you work for Fred's uncle, the ogre, do you? Do you enjoy it?

CRATCHIT: Not very much, ma'am.

MRS. FRED: I should think not. I think of Uncle Scrooge as a great ferocious bear, lurking in the depths of the City.

FRED: There you are, dear. Right as a trivet.

MRS. FRED: Thank you, Freddie. Do continue, gentlemen.

FRED: So, Mister Cratchit, twenty-four pounds, four and eight pence.

CRATCHIT: Yes, sir. Before close of business, tomorrow, sir.

FRED: Do sit, please. Mister Cratchit, you are a long-time employee of my uncle, are you not?

CRATCHIT: Twenty-three years, man and boy, sir.

FRED: Do you feel sufficiently remunerated for your travails?

CRATCHIT: Travails, sir?

FRED: Does he pay you enough?

CRATCHIT: Oh, I can't complain, sir.

FRED: Of course not. Or that hard-hearted old miser would sack you instantly.

CRATCHIT: Oh, sir! Your uncle is a bit tight-fisted at the grindstone, but ...

FRED: My Uncle Ebenezer is a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping old ...

CRATCHIT: Sinner?

FRED: I wouldn't go that far. My mother was his younger sister. She died giving birth ... to me.

CRATCHIT: Ah!

FRED: Twenty-four pounds, four shillings and eight pence.

CRATCHIT: Ah!

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FRED: What portion of Uncle Scrooge's yearly income would twenty-four pounds, four shillings and eight pence comprise, Mister Cratchit?

CRATCHIT: I couldn't rightly say, sir.

FRED: Come, Cratchit. You keep the books for him. What portion of Uncle Scrooge's income would my outstanding debt to him comprise?

CRATCHIT: *(Blinks very hard several times.)* Not the five hundredth part, sir.

FRED: Exactly. Once a penny comes to Uncle Scrooge's hands, it sticks. I think Uncle Scrooge is holding on to an inheritance rightfully mine – that was my mother's money, not his!

CRATCHIT: Ah.

FRED: My fault for being born, you see. To give him his due, he paid for an education, steered me into business. Paid for it out of my own inheritance, I'm sure.

CRATCHIT: Mister Scrooge was always a good man of business.

FRED: A man's business is the welfare and happiness of those around him – and what has he ever done in that line of business? As well as an education, he gave me a name. Miller. Do you understand that name?

CRATCHIT: Was your father, perhaps, a miller, sir?

FRED: No, Robert. When they entered my birth in the parish registry, under 'father's name', they put '*filius mullius*'. Do you know what that means?

CRATCHIT: I don't speaks no French, sir.

FRED: It means 'son of a stranger'. For a last name, they turn '*mullius*' into 'Miller'. Then, I married. And, Uncle Scrooge dropped me forever.

CRATCHIT: It's a terrible shame, sir.

FRED: What do you earn in a week, Robert?

CRATCHIT: Sir!

FRED: How much does the old skinflint pay you?

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CRATCHIT: Well, I ... fifteen bob a week, sir.

FRED: You've been twenty-three years with my uncle, Mister Cratchit!

CRATCHIT: Well, it would be nice to have a little put by. And – my youngest, sir, little Tim. I'm sorry to say he's ill, sir, very ill. If I had just a little extra, sir, but ... chance'd be a fine thing.

FRED: Do you know how old my uncle is, Mister Cratchit? Sixty-two. Sixty-three come February. Your health, Mister Cratchit.

(CRATCHIT chokes on the drink; FRED pounds his back.)

FRED: That's a bit of a morning wake-me-up, isn't it? Now, Bob, man-to-man, you deserve better.

CRATCHIT: *(Between coughs.)* I do. I do! I don't mean to be out of my place, Mister Miller, but I've given him loyalty and devotion and what's he given me, the old ... the old ... miser! There, I said it! I'd be a-deserving of better!

FRED: Well said! Let me fill your glass, my friend. It's an unfair life, Mister Cratchit. Now, drink up and let us, you and I, put our heads together and

discover our best way to kill the old bastard. (*CRATCHIT chokes again and FRED pounds his back again.*) Now, now! I don't mean wringing his miserly neck. I mean this: what will shake Uncle Scrooge out of his misanthropy and cupidity?

CRATCHIT: I told you I don't speaks no French, sir.

FRED: What'll knock the legs out from under him and shake him wide awake?

CRATCHIT: Losing his money, sir. Lord knows he don't enjoy any of it, but, you want to kill the old gentleman, attack his money.

FRED: So how do we do it?

CRATCHIT: I did find a will, this afternoon, sir. An old will. His will.

SCROOGE: Cratchit!

CRATCHIT: Yes, sir?

SCROOGE: Latimer, Tysoe, Miller.

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CRATCHIT: Yes, sir. I spoke with Missus Tysoe and Mister Miller this morning, sir.

SCROOGE: And, Latimer?

CRATCHIT: Actually, sir, I spoke with him last evening, before I went home.

SCROOGE: Why didn't you say so, then?

CRATCHIT: Mister Tysoe will be in tomorrow with the full payment, sir.

SCROOGE: I was sure they'd be short. How can they not be short? Ridiculous.

CRATCHIT: Mister Miller has the full amount. He will send it 'round by ticket porter.

SCROOGE: He had nothing else to say?

CRATCHIT: Oh, several things, sir. 'Good morning, Mister Cratchit', 'Goodbye, Mister Cratchit'. Of that ilk.

SCROOGE: Latimer. A lazier man I've never seen.

CRATCHIT: He came to speak with you last evening, sir, but missed you by a matter of

a few minutes. He'll not have the full amount by the twenty-fourth, but he will, of a certainty, by Tuesday week, sir.

SCROOGE: There, you see! He's probably already legging it with his slattern and his urchins in tow.

NARRATOR: Cratchit draughted the letter of complaint against poor Latimer. Brought to the bailiff, it would result in Latimer being clapped up in Marshalsea Prison and could end with his transportation to New South Wales. Cratchit had the impression New South Wales was somewhere near Cornwall.

A face pushed against the window, a face of some character, although not good character. It glared into the gloom of the office. Cratchit pulled open the door in time to see coat-tails and heels whirling down Lombard Street.

SCROOGE: Cratchit! What was that?

CRATCHIT: Just some street urchin, I think, sir.

SCROOGE: Diseased little monkeys. They need to be put down – by law!

NARRATOR: At last, Scrooge stepped out of the counting-house, donning his great coat, the previous day's receipts tucked carefully into his deepest pocket.

CRATCHIT: Perhaps I should come with you, today, sir. With all the street urchins about, perhaps it might not be safe.

SCROOGE: Humbug!

NARRATOR: While Scrooge was gone, gentlemen, one after the other, to pay their loans. Twenty pounds here and twenty pounds there began to build up to a serious sum. He placed it all the inner lock box and closed the safe. As he did, the siren call of the blue paper of Scrooge's will made him hesitate. We all know, dear reader, that he who hesitates is lost.

CRATCHIT: It would be wrong, Bobby. Just don't do it.

NARRATOR: He firmly closed the lock box (*ALL: SCREE!*) and the safe. (*ALL: SCREEEE!*) Somehow, the blue-wrapped bundle was in his hand.

ALL: LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF EBENEZER SCROOGE

NARRATOR: He would just put it in his desk, for safe keeping. It would be quite wrong of him to look at the contents. There was nothing readable when one

corner of the folded cover sheet was lifted. Time to put it in the desk. Even trying the other side yielded nothing.

4th MAN: Mister Scrooge, is he in?

CRATCHIT: Oh! Neighbour Tysoe, sir. No, he has stepped out.

4th MAN: I want to give this directly to Scrooge. I have a few things to say to him.

CRATCHIT: Don't we all, sir?

4th MAN: Very well, I address myself to you, sir, as to Mister Scrooge. You, sir, are a out-dacious, demogalized, wicious, white-livered thief! A ill-conditioned, ill-tempered, ill-disposed robber! We asked you for some small time to accommodate you, but you would not hear of it. Well, sir, here it is, sir, in full. Count it, keep it and much good it may do you!

NARRATOR: Scrooge only heard from 'in full', which satisfied him immensely.

SCROOGE: Very good, sir. Cratchit, give the man a receipt and show him the door.

(The MAN exits.) Humph! Close the door! I can't afford to heat the whole outdoors.

NARRATOR: Scrooge was busy with his accounts. Cratchit laid a letter opener on top of the grate behind him and made a number of entries in his ledger while he waited. Scrooge was muttering to help the figures add themselves up.

The warmed opener slid under the edge of the wax seal, separating it from the paper, leaving it unmarred and still attached to the upper edge.

Three sheets comprised the document and a fourth sheet, of a different paper, was folded and pushed inside. Cratchit slid the fourth page under the ledger for later. Pretending to work, he read.

ALL: I, EBENEZER SCROOGE, being of sound ... blah, blah, blah ... do make, publish and declare this to be my Last Will and Testament.

I HEREBY DIRECT AND ORDER that all legal and just debts ...

NARRATOR: And so on.

ALL: I HEREBY DIRECT AND ORDER that the bulk of my estate remaining ... blah, blah, blah ... be bequeathed to my partner, Mister Jacob Marley ...

NARRATOR: As Marley had for Scrooge – Scrooge was still living in the old house Marley had left him.

ALL: ... with the following exceptions:

NARRATOR & CRATCHIT: Good heavens!

ALL: I HEREBY DIRECT AND ORDER THAT THE SUM OF £50,000 from my estate shall be given to my younger sister, Miss Fanny Scrooge, on the day of ...blah, blah, blah ... And, FURTHER, I HEREBY DIRECT AND ORDER that the funds held in trust for her from our father's estate ... blah, blah, blah ...

NARRATOR: Fred's mother, of course. Generous of him to give her the inheritance from her father. Fred Miller was a rich man, did he but know it. And, Jacob Marley had died first, meaning there was no one left to inherit the bulk of Scrooge's estate. Frederick Miller? Why should the nephew get it all? What did he ever do to deserve it? Who deserved it more than ...

SCROOGE: CRATCHIT! Are you working all night? I'll not pay a penny more for it. It will be a busy day tomorrow. I expect we shall have a hefty deposit for the twenty-sixth. One hundred and twenty pounds in the safe, at the moment. Be doubly sure that it is locked up.

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CRATCHIT: Yes, sir.

SCROOGE: Do you think we shall see Mister Latimer, at all?

CRATCHIT: I'm sure we shall, sir. He seems a forthright gentleman.

SCROOGE: Gentleman? Humph! Good night to you.

NARRATOR: The will and the loose fourth page went into the lock box. The safe was locked; the fires out. He closed the counting-house door and locked it. He tidied up his desk, closed the ink-well, and began to place it on the grate. Then, he stopped. And went back for the as-yet unread fourth page.

ALL: I, JACOB MARLEY, OF THE CITY OF LONDON, being of sound and disposing mind and memory do declare that this Codicil ...

NARRATOR: A codicil – to Marley's will! A breath of cold air stirred the hair on the back of his neck and he turned, expecting to see old Marley, himself, standing there in his tail-coat, pigtail and breeches. But, it was just wind down the chimney, rather than a ghostly spirit returned to haunt him.

ALL: Marley's will.

NARRATOR: Marley had left everything to Scrooge. Why, then, a codicil? What possible other bequest would make him modify his Final Testament? Perhaps, Cratchit reasoned, if he continued to read, he would find out.

ALL: .. as follows: the sum of £500 is bequeathed, for his long and faithful service, to the principal clerk of the firm of Scrooge & Marley, Mister Robert Cratchit, of the parish of St. Pancras in Camden Town.

CRATCHIT: You whirling bastard! You farthing-faced chit! You pecksniffian, parlour-jumping stretcher! You ... ! You ... cheat!

NARRATOR: Scrooge had removed the codicil's single page from his partner's will, a page he himself had witnessed, and quietly, conveniently, and, oh, so cozily cheated his clerk of the largess bequeathed to him.

CRATCHIT: Five hundred pounds! Ten thousand shillings! One hundred and twenty thousand pennies!

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NARRATOR: His rage was unparalleled – for him. He swore, he roared, he wept, he slammed his fists upon his desktop. Finally, he took the blue-folded will from the safe, fresh paper from his desk, dipped his pen and worked for more than an hour.

At 'Change Alley, as Cratchit finally wended homeward, a boy wearing a too-large hat and a man's coat reaching nearly to his heels, stepped out of the shadows and walked up close by Cratchit's elbow.

DODGER: Hullo, me covey! Oi' Joe wants to see yous.

CRATCHIT: I have no wish to see him. I don't know Old Joe and I don't care to.

DODGER: Look, you can stirs your bacons or the Badger can stirs them for yous.

NARRATOR: A tall man, dressed in faded black, stepped into the light. His face was sharp and narrow – unlike the short fat club he carried. Cratchit hung his head and followed. He had followed strangers into dark places before – when he'd been taken from his father, for instance, and stood before the board of trustees.

1st MAN: Boy, your mother is dead. And your father soon will be. You've been left a burden on the parish.

- 2nd MAN: What are you crying for? What is the boy crying for?
- 3rd MAN: Say your prayers every night, and pray for the people who take care of you – like a Christian.
- 1st MAN: You will be educated and taught a useful trade – like a Christian.
- 2nd MAN: So you'll begin your trade to-morrow morning at six. Learn well and be grateful for the charity of your betters – like a Christian.
- NARRATOR: There followed long days of filling tins with caustic, evil muck for the blacking of boots. His fingers throbbed, nails broke and bled. Then the beadle re-appeared and he was taken to be educated – like a Christian.
- 3rd MAN: Stand, boy. *Triste lupus stabulis*. Construe.
- BOBBY: Do what, sir?
- 3rd MAN: Construe. Do you not know what construe means, boy?
- BOBBY: No, sir. I'm afraid I doesn't.
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- 3rd MAN: You are afraid you *don't*, boy! Construe the meaning of the words.
- BOBBY: What words, sir?
- 3rd MAN: *Triste lupus stabulis, maturis frugibus imbres, arboribus venti, nobis Amaryllidos irae*. Construe!
- BOBBY: I dunno them vords, sir. I hain't bin schooled, perzackly.
- 3rd MAN: There will be none of your disgusting gutter speech in this School! You will speak as respectable Christians do!
- NARRATOR: The master looked down as though the boy were a slug found under a bucket.
- 3rd MAN: Why can you not construe '*triste lupus stabulis*'?
- NARRATOR: Bobby's smile grew wider.
- BOBBY: If you please, sir, I hain't ... I *have never* been shown kunstrew, nor no letters, if you will.

NARRATOR: The master looked at the boy's idiot grin and somehow his anger faded.

3rd MAN: Sit, boy. We shall now become abecedarians, again, and, by our example, young Cratchit *will* learn the alphabet. You, boy, in the far row. Begin!

ALL: *A per se a, B per se b, C per se c ...*

NARRATOR: The youth led him through small streets that were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Catching him by the arm, he drew him through the door of a low-browed, beetling shop.

1st MAN: Wotcher?

DODGER: Plummy and slam!

1st MAN: Who's the t'other one? Where did he come from?

DODGER: Greenland. Is *he* apples and pears?

1st MAN: Yes, *he's* up there. Up with you!

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NARRATOR: Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, was a grey-haired rascal, near seventy years of age. At last:

JOE: At last. At last! I am wery glad to see you, my dear, wery.

CRATCHIT: What do you want? I told Stitcher everything will be ...

JOE: Stitcher! Don't yous mentions him! Don't yous ever mentions him!

NARRATOR: The Badger was now in the room, the short club dangling from his fingers.

JOE: Badger! Did yous get her?

BADGER: She's waiting.

JOE: Right, then. Now ... I'm sorry, my dear. What is your name?

CRATCHIT: Cratchit! Bob Cratchit!

JOE: Very well, Bob Cratchit. We was chatting with a nice young lady, about you, a counting house, a safe, and Christmas Eve. Does you remember?

CRATCHIT: Yes, I remember.

JOE: What we wants to know is: when is Stitche going to pick up this treasure; how will he be a-knowing of where it is – and *where is it?*

NARRATOR: The Badger placed one of his long-fingered hands on the back of Cratchit's neck and began to lift him onto his tip-toes.

CRATCHIT: If I tell you and Stit ... and *he* doesn't get it, he'll kill me – and my family.

JOE: That's shocking, that is. Bring her here, Badger.

NARRATOR: Badger released his hold and left the room, then returned, a larger shadow pushing a smaller into the room.

JOE: Now, then. You'd best be having a good look, the one at the t'other.

NARRATOR: Cratchit's gaze took in untidy shoes, the hem of a muddied dress, a girlish waist, an immodestly low bodice, a good deal of hair, and, finally, a face.

CRATCHIT: Martha! Martha!

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MARTHA: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

JOE: This bit o' jam is one of our girls now. And a sweet little girl, she is.

CRATCHIT: Leave your hands off her!

JOE: Ah, she's a h-honour to her sex. I likes her, so I gives her too much; it'll be the ruin of me. But I'm wishing they was all like her! A good girl, she is.

CRATCHIT: She's my daughter, for god's sake! She works for a milliner in Stepney.

JOE: She did, until Jem Stitche bought her from the old lady.

CRATCHIT: Bought her?

JOE: Tell him, girl. Tell your father how you passed your nights.

MARTHA: I can't.

JOE: Give it a try.

MARTHA: She made us, father. She locked us up and took our clothes and wouldn't

feed us and ... she made us do it.

JOE: That's right. She were entertaining gents. All very genteel. 'Til Jem got hold of her and she took to a-walking of the streets.

MARTHA: *(Pulling free and running to CRATCHIT.)* I'm sorry, father. I'm sorry.

JOE: Now, Martha says her friend Kitty says there's hundreds of pounds to be picked up. Now is Martha lying to me? Or Kitty lying to Martha? Or are you lying to Stitcher?

CRATCHIT: Why would I lie? He was going to slice my throat.

JOE: What a chivvy cove like Stitcher'll do to you is straight up heavenlies to what the Badger will do to you. Badger don't cut nice and clean. Badger blunts 'em proper. Show him, Badger.

NARRATOR: The Badger forced Martha's hand onto the table. The girl's whimper grew to a shriek.

CRATCHIT: I wasn't lying! Hundreds of pounds! Just get there before *he* does.

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JOE: That's fine, then. We can sorts this out without no circumbendibus.

CRATCHIT: Just let her go, please. She's just a girl.

JOE: Badger, nark the titter. Apples and pears.

BADGER: Right. I may help meself, while I'm there.

JOE: 'Tain't on the slate, Badger. Three shillings for her.

BADGER: Three shillings! What's she got that's special?

JOE: It hain't bin in commission so long! Now, Bob, my dear, suppose you goes over what you was a-telling Stitcher and we'll see if we can climb in on it.

**LIGHTS DOWN
END OF ACT ONE**

CRATCHIT

A play based on the novel

Act Two

NARRATOR: Cratchit did not want to wake. The smell of frying kippers made him open his eyes – and he knew he was well behind his time.

CRATCHIT: You didn't wake me. I shall certainly be late. Much has happened. I shall tell you another time.

NARRATOR: With Anne upstairs, Cratchit opened the tea tin which held the household funds and extracted half a nicker. Ten shillings would do it.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Robert! I think you should go to the police about that man.

CRATCHIT: Anne, I can't.

MRS. CRATCHIT: And why is that, then?

CRATCHIT: When I close up tonight, there won't be two hundred pounds in the safe.

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MRS. CRATCHIT: But, Robert! When he ... If that ... Stitcher ...!

CRATCHIT: It'll be closer to five hundred pounds.

NARRATOR: Cratchit kissed her cheek and plunged down the street toward the City. So much to remember this Christmas Eve. So much that had shaken Cratchit's world.

KITTY: 'Cor, Bobby, you smell of kippers. I'll walk your way. I'll be the kisses and you can be me fryer. Here we go, now. Step it out.

CRATCHIT: What do you want, Kitty?

KITTY: Can't I just be glad to sees you?

CRATCHIT: What do you want?

KITTY: Stitcher and me was having a gargle last night, and he turns to me and he says 'Here, Kitty, go sees Bobby Cratchit and reminds him we got han happintement.' An' we do, don't we?

CRATCHIT: Yes.

NARRATOR: Cratchit wondered how soon Martha would become like this girl. Oh, gracious Heaven, Martha! He put the question Kitty wouldn't answer.

CRATCHIT: Tell me how you started doing ... this.

KITTY: Oh, god, Bobby! What you want to know that for?

CRATCHIT: Just tell me the truth.

KITTY: All right. Me dad was an 'ousebreaker and he was cuffing a bit o' jam called Chousing Bett and one day she says 'ere, it's time you was earning your way' and she grabs me by the 'air and drags me into a room with a man and locks the door.

CRATCHIT: How old were you?

KITTY: I were twelve, near enough. Never mind that. Sticher wants to know, when will our happintement be, Bobby?

CRATCHIT: It had best not be until ... until the last midnight bell tolls.

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KITTY: Stone me, you do likes a bit of chunter, don't yous? All right, midnight.

CRATCHIT: The back door will be unlocked; the office open; the safe unlocked. Just take the money, but be sure to close it all after. Is that all you want, then?

KITTY: I'm just handing yous the word. You and me is friends, right?

CRATCHIT: Oh, the best of friends.

KITTY: I said it afore –Willin' Kitty's willing. Oi! I nearly forgot. Sticher wanted me to let you know one other thing.

CRATCHIT: What's that?

KITTY: If you don't be a-keeping of your word, Sticher's got little Martha tucked away. Merry Christmas, Bobby.

CRATCHIT: He doesn't, you know! Old Joe's got her. So, he can talk to Old Joe. But, he'd better do it quick, because I've just now decided something.

KITTY: What have you decided, then?

CRATCHIT: I've decided I'm going to kill them both. Merry Christmas to you!

NARRATOR: Cratchit walked Holborn Hill, hands shaking, nerves a-jangle.

DODGER: Hullo, me covey!

NARRATOR: The lad's topper was just aching for Cratchit to smack it from his head.

CRATCHIT: Tell Old Joe, everything is as we discussed. Midnight. Right at midnight.

DODGER: See, Old Joe wants things to happen faster'n that.

CRATCHIT: You little gobshite! Midnight, not a minute later; not a minute earlier.

DODGER: All right, Mister Cratchit. No need to be throwing a wobbly.

CRATCHIT: One other thing, you dodgy little git. You tell Old Joe, and you tell the Badger that if they lay their daddles on my Martha – I'll pull their guts out – then, just for fun, I'll pull yours out. Now, leg it.

NARRATOR: Cratchit was still making up Scrooge's fire when the door opened.

SCROOGE: Merry humbug, sir! Cratchit! I want every contract due today on my desk.

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NARRATOR: The rusted locks argued long and the hinges screeched their protest, but eventually, Cratchit put the sixteen contracts on Scrooge's desk

SCROOGE: Humph!

CRATCHIT: Sir, the safe is very rusted. We may find ourselves unable to access the company's ready assets, as it were.

SCROOGE: Humph.

CRATCHIT: Well, sir, ha'p'ny of oil now might save you the two or three pound later.

SCROOGE: I don't pay you to think. I pay you to sit on your stool and scribble.

CRATCHIT: Yes, sir,

SCROOGE: Cratchit! Take ha'pence from the cash, go 'round to the ironmonger and fetch back some paraffin oil. Mind that you fetch change and a receipt.

(A shop-bell rings merrily.)

CRATCHIT: Good morning, Mister Gadsby.

GADSBY: Good morning, sir.

CRATCHIT: Paraffin oil, please. A pint.

GADSBY: I've this at ha'pence the pint and this at farthing the pint.

CRATCHIT: I'll have the farth ... I'll have the ha'p'ny tin, please. And, I think, one item more, Mister Gadsby. Behind you there. The second one, please.

NARRATOR: Christmas is a wonderful time. Pedestrians jostling, dropping parcels, exchanging a ...

1st WOMAN: Your pardon, sir.

1st MAN: Excuse me, ma'am.

1st MAN & WOMAN: And a merry Christmas to you!

NARRATOR: Christmas is a wonderful time, if you do not work for Ebenezer Scrooge.

(CRATCHIT copies the will.) Cratchit's anger helped his pen form a close copy of Scrooge's mean and cramped hand.

CRATCHIT: Mister Scrooge, sir, did you plan to make your bank trip today?

SCROOGE: No.

CRATCHIT: Ah. Very good, sir.

FRED: A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE: Bah! Humbug!

FRED: Christmas a humbug, uncle! You don't mean that, I am sure?

(FRED slaps his hand down on Cratchit's desk.)

SCROOGE: I do. Out upon merry Christmas!

(FRED has left behind a folded paper.)

... a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer ...

(CRATCHIT reads the paper.)

If I had my will, every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding ...

(CRATCHIT writes a reply on the back of the paper.)

FRED: Uncle!

SCROOGE: Nephew, keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

FRED: There are many things by which I have not profited, I dare say, Christmas among the rest ...

NARRATOR: Fred Miller was blessed with a number of gifts: good looks; congeniality; a delightful wife. I firmly believe his greatest gift was that of oratory.

FRED: ... and, therefore, I say ‘God bless it!’

(CRATCHIT applauds.)

SCROOGE: Another sound from you and you'll keep Christmas by losing your situation!

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NARRATOR: Cratchit immediately picked up the poker, and coaxed his fire from a few fitful flickerings to nothing at all.

SCROOGE: Good afternoon!

FRED: And a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE: Good afternoon!

FRED: A merry Christmas, Mister Cratchit, and to your good wife.

(They shake hands; the note is passed back to Fred.)

2nd MAN: Have I the pleasure of addressing Mister Scrooge or Mister Marley?

SCROOGE: Marley’s been dead these seven years – seven years ago, this very night.

3rd MAN: We’ve no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner?

NARRATOR: Cratchit knew charitable gentlemen. Cratchit had met charitable gentlemen before, when he visited the board for the second time.

3rd MAN: Petition for a boy to be taken into 'prenticeship from partners in the way of financial matters, Misters Scrooge and Marley, Newman's Court, the City.

1st MAN: Now, which boy is this? Ah! That one. A nasty boy. Your pardon, sir, but have we the pleasure of addressing Mister Scrooge or Mister Marley?

2nd MAN: I am Jacob Marley, sir, and this is my esteemed partner, Mister Ebenezer Scrooge. If the boy is troublesome, shall we say four pounds ten?

1st MAN: Nonsense! He's had the Cockney and the backbone knocked out of him; he knows his letters; and he's very good with numbers.

NARRATOR: The bargain was struck for three pounds, ten shillings. Robert Cratchit, now twelve but looking ten, was led away.

3rd MAN: Be thankful. The charitable gentleman are a-going to 'prentice you, and make a man of you, at a cost to the parish of three pound ten! – all for a nasty orphan which don't nobody love.

SCROOGE: It's enough for a man to understand his own business! Mine occupies me constantly! Good afternoon, gentlemen!

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NARRATOR: Cratchit passed the men the only tuppence he had left. Five o'clock approached.

ALL: 'God bless you, merry gentleman! May nothing you dismay!'

NARRATOR: Scrooge leapt from his stool, seized the steel ruler, flung the door open, but there was nothing outside but the fog and the frost.

SCROOGE: Ragamuffin monkeys! They should be put down. By law!

CRATCHIT: *(Under his breath.)* Yes. Being poor and hungry and ill is surely to be punished.

NARRATOR: Just before five, the street door opened.

SCROOGE: Cratchit!

CRATCHIT: It's Mister Latimer, sir.

LATIMER: Mister Scrooge, sir, I've come about ...

SCROOGE: Twenty pounds, sixteen shillings. *(Holding out his hand without looking.)*

LATIMER: Well, the thing is ...

SCROOGE: How much do you have?

LATIMER: I have fourteen and nine. Here it is, sir.

NARRATOR: Scrooge took the money – oh, he took it all right. He took the money counted it, noted it, placed it in the cash box.

SCROOGE: Fourteen pounds, nine shillings. That's not twenty pounds, sixteen, is it?

LATIMER: It's most of it, Mister Scrooge. We'll have it by Tuesday, week, sir – somehow.

SCROOGE: Six pounds, seven shillings. Tuesday, week. Cratchit!

CRATCHIT: Here it is, Mister Scrooge.

SCROOGE: This is a complaint of bankruptcy and fraud. The bailiffs will place you in Marshalsea Prison. You will be taken before the Court of King's Bench. You will be convicted. And you will be transported!

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LATIMER: For god's sake, Mister Scrooge, I've a wife! I've a very sick child.

SCROOGE: That you were fool enough to bring sickly children into a world overrun with sickly children is no concern of mine! Six pounds, seven shillings. Fifty-three minutes.

NARRATOR: The windows rattled as Latimer slammed the door.

SCROOGE: And, for six pounds, seven shillings, I will have acquired a property worth much more than that. He will simply sign it away. (*SCROOGE puts on his coat and hat.*) You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?

CRATCHIT: If quite convenient, sir.

NARRATOR: For fifteen December twenty-fourths, they'd had the same conversation.

SCROOGE: If I was to stop you half a crown for it, you'd think yourself mightily ill-used, I'll be bound.

CRATCHIT: Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir.

SCROOGE: And yet you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work.

CRATCHIT: It's a dog's wages, not a day's wages –

NARRATOR: ... Cratchit thought, but what he said was ...

CRATCHIT: It's only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE: Be here all the earlier next morning.

NARRATOR: When Cratchit left that night, the back door was unlocked, the safe open, two hundred and five pounds in it. The remainder, two hundred eighty-eight pounds, was in the leather wallet in his pocket, with the wills and the codicil.

(LATIMER is staring off into the distance.)

CRATCHIT: Mister Latimer!

LATIMER: He won't get my home. I may not keep it, but he won't get it. What's six pound to the like of him?

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CRATCHIT: To him, perhaps more than to you and I. He thinks it has value.

LATIMER: What kind of law lets a man's whole life – his wife and children – be dragged from him – for nothing?

CRATCHIT: Bad as it seems, it is the law.

LATIMER: Then the law, sir, is a ass! Where does he live, Mister Cratchit?

CRATCHIT: You're not planning violence, are you?

LATIMER: No more violence than he plans for me. The wheel turns, Mister Cratchit!

CRATCHIT: *(Hand over the money.)* If I give you the money – ! Perhaps ...

LATIMER: Keep it. He doesn't want it. He simply *wants*.

CRATCHIT: Wait! Don't do anything ... anything mad, Latimer! Wait! He's at the George and Vulture, by St. Michael. He has a meal. Follow him home! Wait until then!

NARRATOR: Had he really sent Latimer to commit some outrage upon Scrooge? He

turned – and saw the Badger. Pell-mell, he ran, across into the maze at 'Change Alley and up two blocks to Cornhill!

Cornhill was alive. A group of boys pulled him into their game of sliding on an ice slide, while he desperately searched for the Badger's face. He heard a shrill whistle and saw the gap-toothed rogue whistling with two fingers in his mouth and waving the other arm over his head. Without looking back, he pelted back up Cornhill. Up Finch to Threadneedle; to Throgmorton and on until he lost himself in the alleys of London. The fear he had felt had given way to something – very old. It was anger directed toward all those masters and bullies; charitable gentlemen and parsons; doctors and beadles; even, perhaps, his own father.

Down alley after alley, as fast as his legs would let him. He couldn't keep up that pace. At a stroll, then, at last, he saw he was only one short block from where he had been requested to go. He would visit Fred Miller.

FRED: Robert, my good fellow!

CRATCHIT: Good evening, Missus Miller.

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MRS. FRED: Mister Cratchit.

FRED: *(Reading CRATCHIT's note.)* I can't make it out. Atrocious ink you use at Scrooge & Marley's. Great ... anger?

CRATCHIT: Danger. Great danger.

MRS. FRED: Heavens! Danger, Fred? What sort of danger?

FRED: Danger, Cratchit? What sort of danger?

CRATCHIT: The Badger, sir, and the boys from the old man in Saffron Hill, but Latimer might kill him and I might have told him how, but still there's Stitcher and Kitty, and Marley was to leave me five monkeys –

MRS. FRED: Mister Cratchit! It would be better to start at the beginning. Why, Mister Cratchit, did you arrive here in a state of collapse?

CRATCHIT: Well, the Badger was a-chasing of me. Every time I slid down to the bottom of Cornhill, there he was, looking about through the crowd.

FRED & MRS. FRED: Why were you sliding down Cornhill?

MRS. FRED: Never mind that for now. Why was ... Badger? ... looking for you?

CRATCHIT: On account of my daughter. Perhaps it would be best if I could whisper it to you, Mister Miller ... ?

FRED: 'Pon my soul! How extraordinary! Mister Cratchit may be right, dear. It's rather too rough for a woman's ear.

MRS. FRED: My dear husband, perhaps you forget the condition I am in at the moment, and the very rough circumstances that will result from it.

FRED: Very well. Mister Cratchit's daughter, Martha was, it seems, ahem!, 'taken' by a ruffian from the Angel and has been forced to 'work' for this man Stitcher ...

MRS. FRED: Why is he called Stitcher? Is he a tailor?

FRED: No, dear. He's a criminal – and the 'work' that Martha is forced to do ...

MRS. FRED: She's walking the streets. Elsie is a constant source of surprising information, Fred. So, this man forces your daughter to prostitute herself?

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CRATCHIT: Yes – or, that is, no – you see she's been 'taken' again by another ... gang from down Baldwin's Gardens ... and they want me to ... commit a crime for them to get her returned.

MRS. FRED: So, the question is how do we get Martha back home?

CRATCHIT: It's Old Joe's gang has got Martha ...

MRS. FRED: Old Joe. Is he the one in Baldwin Gardens?

CRATCHIT: Yes. There's other things, Mister Miller, as we were discussing.

FRED: Oh! Yes! Of course. What we were discussing. Money matters, dear.

MRS. FRED: Very well, Fred. I shall leave money matters to your wise head, while I think on Mister Cratchit's problem.

CRATCHIT: This is the document I spoke of, sir.

FRED: Bugger me!

MRS. FRED: *(OFF.)* Fred ...

FRED: This is his will, is it? It's unsealed. It would be wrong of us to read it, of course. *(He opens it.)* He's left everything to old Marley!

CRATCHIT: Who is dead, to begin with. It's this paragraph that you should read, sir.

FRED: 'On the day of her marriage or on the day of her twenty-first birthday'. She died at eighteen, before she married. The clause is null and void.

CRATCHIT: I see. Well, there's one thing more, sir.

FRED: More! Good heavens, Cratchit, you do have adventures, don't you?

CRATCHIT: Like a penny dreadful, sir, with robberies and murders and all. This page was shoved inside that will. Mister Scrooge had hid it, sir.

FRED: A codicil. Are you sure that's Marley's signature?

CRATCHIT: No doubt, sir. When I saw that, I couldn't speak a thrup'ny bit.

FRED: We might have him! What's the penalty for falsifying a will?

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CRATCHIT: It seems to me that Mister Scrooge has a lot on his mind, and, perhaps, we should update this for him ... with a few minor ... amendments – so that we both, sir, get our rightful inheritance. Just make a few ... amendments.

FRED: Amendments? What, you mean ... ah! Clarifications, you might say.

CRATCHIT: I'm sure Mister Scrooge would be grateful for the help. There hain't nobody, sir, nobody but you and me.

FRED: When he goes – if he goes. That would be ... a calamity.

MRS. FRED: Here are your coat and hat, Fred. Take this walking stick; it's the heaviest and the knob is solid brass. Elsie's just returned with the cab – the smart girl brought a growler, not a hansom. Elsie says the girls will be out in force on the streets by now. Bring her back here!

NARRATOR: And that, dear reader, is how, twenty minutes later, Cratchit and Fred drew up in a closed coach to the foot of Hatton Garden at Holborn Hill.

CABMAN: That's as far as I'll go, sir. Are you determined on going in there?

FRED: We are. Go around Gray's Inn Lane as far as Baldwin's Garden and wait.

CABMAN: Yes, sir. Be careful, gentlemen.

NARRATOR: Hatton Garden was deserted for the first two blocks, but ...

WOMAN: Shillin'?

NARRATOR: Fred, not yet fully comprehending the task they had undertaken, was startled, but looked to Cratchit, who shook his head.

FRED: No, thank you, my dear. Not tonight.

NARRATOR: The women were sometimes loud, sometimes quiet, sometimes desperate. Cratchit shook his head each time.

OTHER WOMAN: What cha looking to him for, love? Need daddy's permission, does you?

NARRATOR: At the top, they turned left for a block, then stopped at Leather Lane.

CRATCHIT: I'm going down there. You needn't come.

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FRED: What would I tell my wife? Lead the way, Bob.

NARRATOR: It was a maze of alleys and paths, piled with refuse, filth and stench.

FRED: How can this exist, Cratchit?

CRATCHIT: It exists, sir – perhaps it always will.

ANOTHER WOMAN: Hows about it, captain? Need a friend? (*FRED refuses.*) Hain't we high and mighty, then? What cha doing here? Shall I call the Badger?

FRED: No, no! Don't call the Badger. You startled me. Allow me to apologise.

THE WOMAN: That's all right, captain. How about it, then? No? Hang about. Here's something yous might like.

NARRATOR: She pulled a younger woman from the dark recesses of the doorway into such light as there was. Cratchit, breath stilled, managed to nod his head.

THE WOMAN: Oh, it's for him, is it? Three shillin's.

FRED: Three?

THE WOMAN: Look at her. She's practical still cherry, for all intents and purposes. And I goes with you. To see she don't get hurt.

FRED: Very well, let us be about it. Bob, where's Gray's Inn Lane from here?

CRATCHIT: Let's go, now, Martha. We're going home.

FRED: Cabbie! Here, my man!

THE WOMAN: Here! What you got a cab for? What are you doing?

FRED: We're returning this girl to her family.

THE WOMAN: Ah—ah—ah—ow—ow—oo! Here! He'll beat the daylights out of me if I comes back without her! BADGER! *(She produces a small knife. Fred knocks down her hand with his walking stick and pushes her against the building with it.)* BADGER! He'll do you up a treat, he will!

FRED: Goodnight, my dear! It was a business doing pleasure with you. Driver! Whip up! Quick as you please!

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NARRATOR: Daylight filled the room and he knew he was very late. Trousers and shirt, feet into still wet boots. Then he realised: it was Christmas morning. Martha was safe! Missus Miller had insisted that she stay with them and they'd send her in the morning.

By now, Stitcher and his friends and the Badger and his friends had arrived at the office. The survivors would have left with the contents of the safe. Mister Scrooge would find his office ransacked – his heart pounded and he clapped a hand over his mouth. By now, Latimer had followed Scrooge to his home and ... !

Whatever had happened, he was done with them all. It was Christmas morning. There was a loud knock.

TOM: Missus Cratchit? Here you are, missus. Merry Christmas. *(He hands over a large turkey, wrapped up with a blue ribbon.)*

MRS. CRATCHIT: But who could have sent it?

TIM: I know. I know who sent it.

CRATCHIT: Who?

TIM: Mister Scrooge.

(They all laugh and hug TIM.)

MRS. CRATCHIT: What am I supposed to do with it? In two days, all we'll have is a great ... stinking thing. Just like a man to send something as useless as that!

CRATCHIT: I shall take little Tim to mass. He enjoys it so and he does love the singing.

MRS. CRATCHIT: Very well. Bundle him up; it's a crisp day. Merry Christmas, husband.

CRATCHIT: Merry Christmas, my dear.

NARRATOR: The tumbled gates of St. Pancras Old Church were awesome. The vaulted rafters that had been there since Billy The Conqueror started conquering were inspiring. Stitcher's baleful glare full upon him was terrifying.

PRIEST: God, whose Name is excellent in all the Earth, and thy Glory above the Heavens, who on this day did miraculously preserve our State ...

NARRATOR: He could never outrun Stitcher with Tim in his arms.

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PRIEST: ... deliverance from the tyranny and oppression of the same Cruel and Blood-thirsty enemies; We bless and adore thy glorious Majesty ...

NARRATOR: Was there even a side door he could slip out of? No, there was not.

PRIEST: ... again hast so wonderfully Rescued and Established a Blessing to us, and our Posterity. And this we beg for Jesus Christ his sake, Amen. Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

ALL: And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.

NARRATOR; Cratchit was through the tumbled gate now.

TIM: You're hurting me, Papa!

CRATCHIT: I'm sorry, son. I'm sorry.

NARRATOR: He knew couldn't outrun Stitcher. He knew couldn't outwit Stitcher, for Stitcher had no wits. He knew he could only face him and hope.

CRATCHIT: There's a man coming, Tim. You mustn't worry. He won't hurt you.

STITCHER: You snivelling little ink-bottle. You think I'd harm you inside the lean and lurch?

CRATCHIT: I think you'll harm me, one way or another.

STITCHER: Oh, I will. I'll harm you a treat. Where is she? Where's the girl!

KITTY: It hain't a back alley in the Angel, Jemmie. It's Christmas Day, in front of the lean and lurch there, in broad daylight. There's people about, Jemmie.

STITCHER: I'll stitch him. And his little pup, sticking his head up and peeping around! What'd you bring a disgusting cripple out for people to look at for?

TIM: I hope the people *did* see me, because I *am* a cripple, and they should remember on Christmas Day Who made cripples walk, and blind men see.

STITCHER: What'd he say? Why'd he say that?

KITTY: Jemmie, let's go. On your way, Bobby. Merry Christmas.

CRATCHIT: Goodbye, Stitcher. Merry Christmas, Kitty.

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STITCHER: Where's he going? What's he think he's doing?

KITTY: Stitcher, hain't no need for it, now.

STITCHER: Let go o' me, girl! Let go, I said!

KITTY: Stitcher, don't! Jemmie!

NARRATOR: When police arrived, several told of a man in a brown hat who had left a white dog tied up at the church.

Then came the night. There was a lump in his throat, sweat on his hands, and a quaver in his knees. In short, Robert Cratchit was frightened. Martha was gone. Jem Stitcher had got over the fence and taken her.

In the Angel, he searched the back alleys and lanes, hoping to find her; turned over piles of garbage, hoping not to find her. The girls on the street corners turned away or turned vicious. He had cried in despair and beaten his hands on the walls, until one of the girls stepped out of her doorway.

GIRL: Oi, captain. The Red Lion. They all go there to hide after something like that. The Red Lion at 'ockley-In-The-'ole – but be very careful.

CRATCHIT: Why tell me this?

GIRL: Jem Stitcher's a brute. He's beat me purple a dozen times. And, I liked Kitty. The Red Lion on Turnmill Street. For God's sake, be careful.

NARRATOR: His plan was horribly simple. He was going to walk in and announce loudly that he was looking for Jem Stitcher.

A weather-faded shingle: the Red Lion – of all the dark places that covered the rot of London, this was the foulest and most cruel.

1st WOMAN: There was a fire in the tap-room ...

1st MAN: Some creatures were drinking before it ...

2nd WOMAN & MAN: Others were gathered around tables, intent on games ...

4th WOMAN: A few women were also present ...

3rd WOMAN: Some withdrawn into corners ...

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2nd WOMAN: Some very much in attendance on their man.

1st MAN: I'm low, and Ped's high.

2nd MAN: Tip and me's game.

3rd MAN: Fifteen four and a flush of five.

1st WOMAN: Bob for a yanepatine.

2nd WOMAN: Jack for a gen.

4th MAN: Oi, Bill, I can stand for a top o' reeb!

LANDLORD: What?

CRATCHIT: Jem Stitcher.

LANDLORD: Are you taking the piss? Hop it.

CRATCHIT: Tell him it's about the dosh he hooked from me.

LANDLORD: I'll pound it you're either bleeding barmy or you've got the brassiest

cobblers in London.

CRATCHIT: I'm probably barmy, but I still gots to see Stitcher.

LANDLORD: *(After a long pause.)* Hang about. Lushin' Loo! Cool this tosser.

CRATCHIT: Are you Loo?

LOO: That's right. I'm to keep an eye on yous. Now, I could keep an eye on yous out here, or ... we could go in back, where there hain't so many.

CRATCHIT: *(He takes a coin out and give it to her.)* Get what you like.

LOO: Thank you, love. *(She orders a drink.)* You're a gentleman. Is you really going up to have a rabbit with Stitcher?

CRATCHIT: I am.

LOO: Then, what say you give me what else you got, 'cause you won't be needing it, no more. Come on, love.

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(He gives her another coin.)

LANDLORD: *(Returning.)* Charley! Be a-taking this cove to Stitcher. Mind he gets there.

NARRATOR: If a man can change in a day, Jem Stitcher had. He was listless, groggy, almost lifeless. On the table were a tin mug and two bottles, one open and standing proudly, one on its side and quite empty.

JEM: You! You think, because we got the dosh, I wouldn't do you, right now?

CRATCHIT: You found the money, Jem?

JEM: More'n two hundred quid. See? – every gen. But now, I needs a safe place, dun I? 'Cause of her.

CRATCHIT: I only want to know where she is, Stitcher.

JEM: Where she is? She's dead, you berk!

CRATCHIT: *(Thinking JEM means MARTHA.)* When?

JEM: This morning, you great divvy. You was there.

CRATCHIT: You mean, Kitty? You didn't take Martha away, tonight?

JEM: If I wasn't elephants, I'd break you in two, you divvy shite. If you hadn't wandered into the Angel, she'd still be alive, wouldn't she?

CRATCHIT: Is Kitty dead, Jem?

JEM: You made me kill her! You cowson git! You think you're a-going to be walking out of here?

NARRATOR: Cratchit was reaching behind him for the latch of the door.

CRATCHIT: You killed Kitty, Jem? Did you kill her?

JEM: You bastard! Of course I did! Right in front of the church. I slit her pretty white throat! Just like I'm going to do yours, now!

(He produces his knife and runs at CRATCHIT.)

THE MEN: *(Entering suddenly.)* In the King's name!

NARRATOR: The bobbies came on, truncheons swinging. In a surprisingly short time, Jem Stitcher was on his face on the floor with irons on his wrists.

JEM: You minging bastard! I'll do you up a treat, you bleater! Gerroff me!

1st PEELER: Now, sir, it would be better if you were quiet, please.

2nd PEELER: We heard it all, sir. His own words will hand him over to Jack Ketch.

CRATCHIT: Could you hold him tightly, please, officers?

JEM: What do you want, you milky little queanie? I'll stripe you, I will.

CRATCHIT: I simply want this, Jemmy. Officers, this belongs to the firm where I am employed. He stole it. There should be two hundred and five pounds here.

THE PEELERS: Blimey!

CRATCHIT: If you permit me, I shall return this. Do you wish to count it?

1st PEELER: No need. If needs must, sir, we knows who you are, Mister Latimer.

CRATCHIT: Where does he go?

3rd PEELER: This article, here, sir, will be in the Old Bailey, tomorrow. Then, I expect, he'll be hanging about outside Newgate. Won't you, chuckaboo?

JEM: Gerroff.

1st PEELER: Good night, then, sir. And thank you for coming to us, and for your help – and your guts, sir. That took some, it did.

NARRATOR: When they had disappeared, he transferred what he had recovered from Jem to the wallet and turned his face resolutely toward Baldwin's Gardens.

DODGER: Hullo, me covey. What's the row? You hain't exactly the birdies of summer 'round this yard, mate. Scarper.

CRATCHIT: Where's Old Joe?

DODGER: You got your ringers in your lords? Scarper! The Badger's wanting yous.

CRATCHIT: I've had my fill of you, the Badger, and Old Joe. I've seen a friend murdered, and I've just dealt with the bastard who did it, and now I'm going to find my daughter. Don't get in my way.

DODGER: What're you rabbiting on about? Who's murdered and who done it?

CRATCHIT: One of Stitcher's girls, Kitty Fisher. Jemie cut her throat in public.

DODGER: Blimey! The manky shite! He hain't going to live out the week.

CRATCHIT: He won't, either. He's in Newgate.

DODGER: Pull the other one.

CRATCHIT: The peelers pulled *him* out of the Red Lion an hour gone. Now, where is he?

DODGER: If yous insist on mounting the cart, it's your chips, mate. He's up there. Plummy and slam's your word. I'll follow, but it's your ticket.

VOICE: Wotcher?

CRATCHIT: Plummy!

VOICE: You what now?

CRATCHIT: ... and slam! Plummy and slam! I've got to see Joe!

VOICE: Does Joe gots to see yous?

CRATCHIT: I've news for him! It's about Stitcher!

VOICE: Yeah, all right. Let's go see Joe. This way.

BADGER: Welcome back, covey. Hain't we going to have a bit of narking, now?

CRATCHIT: Oh, soldiers! Old Joe needs a chin-wag with me, now. Bugger off or I'll stick that beater up your aris!

JOE: Don't be out of temper, my friend. Come closer if you will. You told me there'd be half a monkey just sitting there, last night.

CRATCHIT: There was. Stitcher got there first.

JOE: So, the dosh is gone – but you're here. Hain't that the 'ound's rounds?

NARRATOR: **PERUSAL COPY ONLY – CONTACT AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS** The old man flung his beaker across the room, but the missile just sent a stream of liquid over Cratchit's trouser-leg. It was a remarkably strong gin.

DODGER: He's got news to give yous, Joe.

JOE: What are you doing here? You're supposed to be out trolling.

DODGER: He's got news for you, Joe.

JOE: If I wants news, I'll buy The Times.

CRATCHIT: Stitcher striped one of his girls, this morning, Kitty, up at St. Pancras Old Church. The one what told my Martha about the dosh in the adams.

JOE: Girls is girls. They comes and they goes. How do you be a-knowing this?

CRATCHIT: It was me he was going to stripe – Kitty stepped in.

JOE: More fool she, then.

CRATCHIT: So, tonight, the peelers dragged Stitcher out of the Red Lion. He'll swing by mid-week. I was there.

JOE: *You* was in the Red Lion?

CRATCHIT: I went there looking for Stitcher. I found him.

JOE: – and lived to tell about it? Walk-er-er!

CRATCHIT: You see, I thought he'd taken my Martha.

JOE: We got the girl, Bobby. *We* got her, not Stitcher.

CRATCHIT: Let her go and I'll tell you where the money is.

JOE: My eye. You'll tell us, one way or another.

(BADGER steps forward. DODGER moves to the door.)

JOE: What's the matter with you?

DODGER: I'm going out to take the air, if you doesn't mind.

JOE: Please yourself. Now then, Badger! Lay hands upon him!

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CRATCHIT: Wait! I'll tell you where the money is. I just want my daughter back.

JOE: She's worth a lot, Robby. A lot of the needful.

CRATCHIT: How long is she good for, on the street? She can bring you two hundred quid – now! I know where the money is. It's in Stitcher's crib in the Angel. No argle-bargle. She's my daughter, Joe. She's my daughter.

JOE: Well, that's a new pair of boots, that is. Yeah, all right. We'll do it, now.

CRATCHIT: Can I have a drink, Joe? I sort of need one.

JOE: Knock yourselves out. There it is.

(JOE exits and CRATCHIT lifts the gin bottle as if to drink. From OFF, JOE roars in anger and runs back in.)

She's gone! Take him out of it, Badger! Cut his throat. Saw his head off!

NARRATOR: And suddenly the voice became a shriek for Cratchit had kicked over Joe's small brazier, scattering the coals as he dashed the bottle to floor among them. The liquor roared into flame up Joe's pant legs. Cratchit flung Joe's

chair at Badger and bolted. Behind him, Joe's shriek went on and on.

Cratchit caught the newel at the top of the stair and saw the Badger half-way down the hall. The stair-well guard was coming up from below. Cratchit caught him full in the face with his boot. The club swished past.

Cratchit rounded the corner and headed down the first floor passage. One more flight, but the Badger's feet hit the hall floor, closer than before.

Again, Cratchit spun on the newel post. He saw the Badger above, club raised, and fell onto his back, sliding as the club swished over his head.

He banged hard down the stair, grasped desperately at balusters as they flicked past, finally clutching one as Badger reached the top of the stair.

He rolled over the railing and fell to the floor, hearing the smash of the club on the rail above; scrambling up and running, shaken but determined.

Faces peered from doorways, pulled back as he ran toward them, gasping for breath. The Badger roared his anger; the doors slammed shut.

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The rear door of the tenement was partway off its hinges. The thudding feet behind him closed. Cratchit flung the door shut with both hands, catching the Badger full in the face before the rotten wood gave way.

Cratchit was already in the alley, but the Badger was on his feet and running. A side alley neared, but a hand closed on Cratchit's neck.

The club came down but Cratchit twisted sideways and kept twisting. Badger cursed and swung again, but it struck bricks. Cratchit tripped among the dust bins, his grin widened into a face-cracking smile, right hand groping in his coat pocket, as the Badger raised his arm for the kill.

The first barrel of the two-barrel pistol Cratchit had bought second-hand from the ironmonger discharged directly into the Badger's face, placing a neat hole near the centre of the brute's forehead. The report was surprisingly small, a mere crack devoid of echo, but the Badger staggered backward and toppled, slowly at first but with a final surge, onto his back among the rubbish. He did not move. From the top floor of the building, smoke began to roll from windows and shouts and screams could be heard.

DODGER:

'Struth! Cor blimey! Is that the Badger? Nah, nothing to worry about, chuckaboo. We'll make a villain of you, yet.

CRATCHIT: He was ...

DODGER: I seen it. You did us all a right Lambeth just there. Of all on 'em, the Badger was the worst. And ...

CRATCHIT: Martha! She's still in there! Martha!

DODGER: Hang about. Here she is, mate. I slid her out the winder and we shinned down the drain-pipe. Cor, she's a right game'un, she is.

MARTHA: *(She goes to the BADGER's body and kicks him.)* What do we do now?

DODGER: End of the alley, two blocks, and you're on Gray's Inn Lane, takes you straight on to Camden Town and afore you knows it, you're at the gates.

CRATCHIT: Where will you go?

DODGER: I'll be all right or me name hain't Jack Dawkins.

CRATCHIT: And, is your name Jack Dawkins?

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DODGER: There's some as calls me that.

(He doffs his topper and, whistling a tune, exits. Bow bells begin to peal midnight. Cratchit and Martha, arms about each other, exit.)

NARRATOR: Newsboys in Cheapside cried the news of two men dead in a fire in Baldwin's Gardens. Cratchit came to Lombard Street, the leather wallet tugging with each step. A hand pulled him into the alley at Birchin Street.

LATIMER: I done it! God help me! I done it! Quick as you like, and neat as a pin. No taking it back, now! I'm finished I am. There's no place for me, no more!

NARRATOR: And Latimer ran down the lane. Cratchit's mind was in a whirl. Latimer had 'done it', 'quick as you like'. In Newman's Court, from habit, Cratchit pulled the key from his pocket but stopped. The door opened at once.

Just put the money into the safe, he told himself, along with the will that he and Fred had forged (and Marley's codicil), lock it all and leave.

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

CRATCHIT: I am very sorry, sir. I am behind my time.

SCROOGE: You are. Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please.

CRATCHIT: It's only once a year, sir. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir.

SCROOGE: Now, I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore –

(CRATCHIT grabs the heavy steel ruler on SCROOGE's desk, but SCROOGE leaps from his stool and gives him a poke in the waistcoat.)

– and therefore I am about to raise your salary! A merry Christmas, Bob. A merrier Christmas, Bob than I have given you for many a year. I'll raise your salary, I'll assist your struggling family. We'll discuss it at The George & Vulture this very afternoon.

CRATCHIT: Mister Scrooge?

SCROOGE: I am in earnest, Bob. I have seen the folly and waste of it all. Have you ever committed a folly, Bob?

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CRATCHIT: Very nearly, Mister Scrooge. Very nearly.

NARRATOR: The £493 tucked into Cratchit's waistcoat burned into his skin.

SCROOGE: Oh! While I am thinking of it – that fellow – Latimer! – visited me at the George & Vulture on Christmas Eve. Accosted me! Upbraided me for full five minutes! Where is that contract?

CRATCHIT: It's in the safe, sir. Locked up in the safe. Safe in the safe.

SCROOGE: That seems a very good place for it to sit for a few days. We'll send a message 'round to tell him to see us on Monday. How does that sound?

NARRATOR: It took only a little trickery for Bob to get the will and the money back into the safe, the back door secured and all as it was on Christmas Eve. He stood in Scrooge's office and breathed.

CRATCHIT: God bless us, every one!

SCROOGE: What was that, Cratchit? What did you say?

CRATCHIT: I said, 'God bless us, every one', sir.

SCROOGE: Isn't that odd? I'm sure I've heard that before. What were you about?

CRATCHIT: Just checking that the safe is locked, sir. There's a deal of money in there.

SCROOGE: Money? Bah! Humbug! Don't worry about money today! Get your hat and comforter. A very important bowl of smoking bishop awaits us both!

NARRATOR: The office of Scrooge & Marley was closed in a twinkling and the two friends, master and man, departed for lunch and a glass at The George & Vulture. As the door closed, Mister Scrooge was heard to inquire:

SCROOGE: By the by, Bob, did your family receive the prize turkey I sent to you?

NARRATOR: For the rest of that day, and every Christmas Day for many years afterward, visitors wanting to see Mister Scrooge – or Mister Marley – were greeted with a sign hung on the door reading:

ALL: 'CLOSED due to A MERRY CHRISTMAS'.

NARRATOR: And so it was, Lord bless it, so it was – and so, dear reader, is this tale.

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LIGHTS DOWN
END OF ACT TWO
END OF PLAY