

PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT, EBENEZER!
OR, YOU'LL BE SINGIN' A CHRISTMAS CAROL
By Rod Hearn and Catherine Cook

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**PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT, EBENEZER!
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SYNOPSIS: It's the holiday season at Scrooge & Marley's Saloon in the Wild West, but the gun-slinging, tight-fisted Scrooge has everyone feeling cold and miserable. It's up to the ghosts of Christmases Past, Present and Comin' Up to show Scrooge the true meaning of Christmas in this magical, fast-paced, rough and ready version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* with plenty of music, dance, and quick-draw shootin'!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9-20 female, 9-18 male, 0-2 either, 5+extras; doubling possible)

RUDOLPH (m).....	A drunk. <i>(4 lines)</i>
HOLLY (f).....	Saloon dancer. <i>(2 lines)</i>
IVY (f).....	Saloon dancer. <i>(3 lines)</i>
NOEL (f).....	Saloon dancer. <i>(2 lines)</i>
ANGEL (f).....	Saloon dancer. <i>(2 lines)</i>
FROSTY (f).....	Rougher saloon dancer. <i>(4 lines)</i>
KLAUS (m).....	A bouncer, Arnold Schwarzenegger-style. <i>(13 lines)</i>
SCROOGE (m).....	Our greedy saloon owner. <i>(129 lines)</i>
FRED (m).....	His nephew. <i>(46 lines)</i>
BOB (m).....	His bartender. <i>(26 lines)</i>
POLLY (f).....	A do-gooder. <i>(14 lines)</i>
ANNA (f).....	Another. <i>(16 lines)</i>
JACKIE MARLEY (f).....	His former business partner and dance hall manager. <i>(17 lines)</i>
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST (f).....	A young, Annie Oakley type. <i>(17 lines)</i>
YOUNG SCROOGE (m).....	Just a little boy. <i>(3 lines)</i>
SCHOOLMARM (f).....	Not very nurturing. <i>(2 lines)</i>

FAN (f)	Scrooge's sister. (3 lines)
FEZZIWIG (m).....	Scrooge's former boss, jovial. (3 lines)
MRS. FEZZIWIG (f)	Fezziwig's wife, equally jovial. (2 lines)
YOUNG MAN SCROOGE (m).....	In his upper teens. (9 lines)
DICK (m).....	Scrooge's young co-worker. (3 lines)
BELLE (f).....	Scrooge's girl, lovely. (10 lines)
BELLE'S HUSBAND (m).....	(3 lines)
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT (f)	A sassy, Mae West type. (20 lines)
FRED'S WIFE (f).....	(19 lines)
SISTER (f).....	Her sister. (13 lines)
TOPPER (m).....	Fred's friend. (9 lines)
BELINDA CRATCHIT (f)	Bob's daughter. (7 lines)
PETER CRATCHIT (m).....	Bob's son. (20 lines)
MRS. CRATCHIT (f)	Bob's wife. (18 lines)
MARTHA CRATCHIT (f)	Bob's oldest daughter. (5 lines)
TINY TIM (m).....	Bob's youngest son. (1 line)
COWBOY 1 (m).....	Out camping. (4 lines)
COWBOY 2 (m).....	Out camping. (3 lines)
COWBOY 3 (m).....	Out camping. (2 lines)
COWBOY 4 (m).....	Out camping. (2 lines)
LAUNDRY LADY (f).....	Bitter. (6 lines)
COOK (m/f).....	Bitter. (4 lines)
OLD JOE (m).....	Buys stuff. (13 lines)
OFFSTAGE VOICES (m/f).....	(1 line)

EXTRAS:

FOUR CAROLERS (m/f).....	Spreading some seasonal cheer. (<i>Singing, Non- Speaking</i>)
IGNORANCE (m).....	A scrawny young boy. (<i>Non-speaking</i>)
WANT (f)	A scrawny young girl. (<i>Non-speaking</i>)

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GHOST OF CHRISTMAS

COMIN' UP (m)A scary Sheriff dressed all in
black, face covered.

(Non-speaking)

PASSERSBY WITH GIFTS (m/f).....A few here and there.

(Non-Speaking)

PARTY GUESTS (m/f)*(Non-Speaking)*

BELLE'S CHILDREN (m/f)*(Non-Speaking)*

SUGGESTED DOUBLING

RUDOLPH/YOUNG MAN SCROOGE/TOPPER/COWBOY 1

HOLLY/SCHOOLMARM/MARTHA CRATCHIT

IVY/BELLE

NOEL/SISTER

ANGEL/BELINDA CRATCHIT

FROSTY/MRS. FEZZIWIG

KLAUS/FEZZIWIG/OLD JOE

FRED/COWBOY 2

BOB/COWBOY 3

POLLY/COOK

ANNA/LAUNDRY LADY

JACKIE MARLEY/FRED'S WIFE

YOUNG SCROOGE/BELLE'S SON/IGNORANCE

FAN/BELLE'S DAUGHTER/WANT

DICK/BELLE'S HUSBAND/COWBOY 4

PETER CRATCHIT/CAROLER/PARTY GUEST

MRS. CRATCHIT/CAROLER/PARTY GUEST

CAROLERS/PASSERSBY WITH GIFTS/OFFSTAGE VOICES/ PARTY
GUESTS

TIME: Late afternoon on December 24, 1864 in Stagecoach, Nevada.

SETTING

A run-down saloon and hotel. There is an open door near down left, with a bar spanning stage left from downstage to upstage. A wood-burning stove stands downstage of the door, wood piled nearby. Running along this wall is a balcony with at least three doors to hotel rooms with stairs upstage left. There might be an upright player-piano (or piano) tucked underneath the stairs. Just right of upstage center is a proscenium with a raised stage and footlights that jut out into the playing space, with curtains that have seen better days. There is a wagon upstage of the curtain that will later carry scenery and actors downstage. Down right is the cashier's cage and Ebenezer's office. A few tables and chairs are scattered around. The whole place is worn and dusty, but looks as though it was once a jewel of a saloon, dance hall and hotel.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE, SCENE 1: Scrooge & Marley's Saloon

ACT ONE, SCENE 2: Scrooge's bedroom

ACT ONE, SCENE 3: Scrooge & Marley's Saloon

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO, SCENE 1: Scrooge's bedroom

ACT TWO, SCENE 2: Scrooge & Marley's Saloon

SPECIAL EFFECTS

HATS SHOT OFF:

The four carolers should stand with their backs to the offstage side. Each hat should have one end of fishing line tied to the FRONT brim with the rest trailing over the back of the hat offstage to a crew member on the other end. It's best if all four lines are tied together offstage so only one crew member is needed for the stunt. On cue, the crew person should pull the lines and the hats will flip off backwards.

BOTTLE POURING BY ITSELF:

A crafty prop person can easily construct this magical prop. Using an empty bottle, adhere to the bottom of the inside a spring with fishing line leading to a hook that hangs out just over the lip of the bottle. Allowing for some give in the line when it is tipped, the hook grabs another line adhered across the mouth of the glass. Liquid pours down the line into the glass while the hook from the bottle suspends the glass in mid-air, allowing the actor to remove the hand holding the glass for a moment. Audiences will love this effect!

TIP OF THE GUN GLOWS:

This can be achieved by attaching a small LED flashlight to the end of the gun on the upstage side. The actor can surreptitiously turn the LED on and off.

BOTTLE BREAKING ON BAR TOP:

Break away bottles (sugar glass) are readily available on the internet. In the original production a small hole was drilled into the set behind one of them so that it could shatter on cue by hitting it sharply.

Do Not Copy

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *A dirge-like version of "Jingle Bells" plays on a piano in a minor key, accompanied by FIVE DANCERS on stage, each wrapped in a coat, scarf, and gloves, shivering. We see townsfolk walking up and down the boardwalk through swinging saloon doors and a window that is painted "Scrooge & Marley's." As the can-can number nears its dreadfully slow and anti-climactic finale, it is interrupted.*

RUDOLPH: *(Quite drunk with a red nose, naturally.)* I can't take it anymore! You know, when old lady Marley was alive, you girls would've been—

HOLLY: Now, Rudolph, hush up or he'll hear ya!

RUDOLPH: I don't care one bit, Holly! That Scrooge is sitting back in that cashier's cage shut up like an oyster, counting his money.

IVY: Rudolph, you know our Christmas show would be better if it were warmer in here. Noel, go ask him if we can shut the door, and maybe Bob can put more wood in the stove.

NOEL: Ask him yourself, Ivy!

IVY: No! Angel sweetheart, why don't you go ask him?

ANGEL: That squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, greedy old snake? You won't catch me asking him for the fuzz off'n a peach!

ALL GIRLS: *(Except FROSTY.)* Frosty?

FROSTY: *(Who has been taking a cigar break.)* What?

ALL GIRLS: *(Except FROSTY. After a pause.)* Nothing.

RUDOLPH: *(Crossing to the door.)* Look, Klaus, I know old Scrooge likes to keep this here door open no matter the weather so folks know he's open. Well, you know, even old Jackie Marley would've let us close the door on Christmas Eve.

KLAUS: Old lady Marley dead as doornail. Scrooge say he will shoot anyone who touch dis door or put wood in stove without asking his permission.

RUDOLPH: Well, will you just ask then?

KLAUS: *(After deep thought.)* I'll be back.

KLAUS crosses from the door to SCROOGE'S cage. Everyone watches RUDOLPH sneak to the open door and start to shut it. ALL

nonchalantly back upstage and KLAUS ducks, almost in one movement, so that SCROOGE can have a clear shot. RUDOLPH squeaks the front door, freezes, as a hand comes out from the cage between the bars and shoots RUDOLPH in one shot. HE stumbles backward onto the poker table, sending it crashing to the floor. SCROOGE enters as KLAUS drags RUDOLPH out the door, bumping into FRED in the doorway.

FRED: *(To SCROOGE, who has stepped out from behind the cage.)* I see yer havin' yerself a grand ol' Christmas as usual, Uncle! God bless ya! *(Goes to hug him.)*

SCROOGE: Bah! Humbug!

FRED: Christmas a humbug, Uncle? Come on now, ya don't mean that!

SCROOGE: I do mean it! Christmas! What right do you have to be so happy about it? You're poorer than a church mouse! Why, I'm certain you cain't afford to buy presents since you never seem to work much.

FRED: Why do you have to act so pitiful mean—yer richer'n Midas!

SCROOGE: Bah humbug! Now get outta here. You can see I'm busy. *(Starts counting his coins again inside the cashier's cage.)*

FRED: *(Starting to leave.)* Why, yer meaner than a scorpion stuck in a jug of ants. Merry Christmas!

SCROOGE: *(Coming back into the room.)* If I could have my way, every fool that runs around shoutin' Merry Christmas would be tied to a cactus 'til summer comes around and burns the buttons off his breeches!

FRED: Uncle!

SCROOGE: Nephew! You tend to Christmas in yer way, and I'll tend to it in mine.

FRED: *Tend* to it? But ya don't tend to it!

SCROOGE: I'll leave it be, then. See if it'll do you any good.

FRED: Good? There's a lot that does good that doesn't put a penny in my pocket. I always thought of Christmas as a good time—a time to be kind, giving. Why, I reckon it's the only time of year when people open their hearts and think of what good they might do before they ride the last stagecoach out of this world. And I tell you—heck, even

though my pockets may be thirsty the rest of my life, I believe Christmas *has* done me good and *will* do me good, God bless it!

At this, BOB, who has been pouring drinks and cleaning glasses behind the bar, applauds FRED loudly, then with a glance from SCROOGE, suddenly removes his scarf and starts cleaning glasses with it, shivering.

SCROOGE: Let me hear another peep outta you and you'll keep yer Christmas by losin' yer job! (To FRED.) Yer quite a talker, Freddy. It's a wonder you don't pack up and move to Carson City and work in the legislature passin' laws and budgets and such. (SCROOGE starts back to his cage.)

FRED: Aw, come on, Uncle. You can't stay mad as a sidewinder stuck out in a snowstorm! Come have a little Christmas grub with us tomorrow!

SCROOGE: (Now back in his cage.) Goodbye.

FRED: But Uncle, I don't want anything from ya—don't bring a thing—just yer charmin' self—

SCROOGE: Out!

FRED: All right, Uncle. (To BOB.) In the spirit of Christmas, I've tried. (Nearly back at the door, hollers back to SCROOGE.) Merry Christmas, Uncle!

FRED starts to leave then sneaks over to the woodpile, picks up a log—everyone backs out of the way like they did earlier with RUDOLPH—and touches the handle of the wood stove. In the silence, SCROOGE'S hand pokes again through the bars of the cage, and issues a warning click by pulling back the hammer of his gun.

FRED: Just kiddin'.

Puts down the log as KLAUS "escorts" him out the door, nearly knocking over two suffragette types just coming into the saloon.

POLLY: Excuse us. Well, here we are: Scrooge and Marley's.

ANNA: *(To KLAUS.)* Do we have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley? *(KLAUS points over toward the cage.)* Oh, well...Polly?

POLLY: Anna? *(They stride together with purpose over to the cage.)*

ANNA: Do we have the pleasure—

SCROOGE: *(Poking his head out of the cage.)* Miss Marley died seven years ago, this very night.

ANNA: Oh... well... Polly?

POLLY: Anna?

ANNA: We have no doubt that Miss Marley's generosity is well represented by her surviving partner.

SCROOGE: *(Smiling as he comes out of his cage.)* You're as right as rain on a sweaty July afternoon. Miss Marley kept her cash as close to her as a mamma cougar keeps her cubs, and I fully intend to carry on that fine tradition. Thank you for stopping by—have a drink on yer way out the door. *(SCROOGE returns to inside his cage.)*

ANNA: Polly! *(She thrusts the donation list at her.)*

POLLY: Anna! *(Giving it right back.)*

ANNA: At this festive time of year, on behalf of women all across the state of Nevada, we take up a collection to help the poor and destitute.

POLLY: So many are in need, sir.

SCROOGE: Aren't there jails in every city across the state?

ANNA: Yes, plenty, sir.

SCROOGE: And ain't there still plenty of work in the silver mines? They're still runnin'?

POLLY: Why, yes, although they are dangerous and kill miners nearly every single day!

SCROOGE: Glad to hear it! I thought from what you were sayin' that the jails and mines had been shut down!

ANNA: Oh, well... *(Pleading with her now to take over this one.)* Polly?

POLLY: *(A touch irritated now and losing patience as she speaks.)* Anna. Mr. Scrooge, jails and mines hardly provide Christmas cheer. What we're attempting to do here is raise some money to buy the poor something nice to eat and drink for Christmas. We do this every Christmas, because, well, this is a time of year when people in need notice it the most and people with plenty of money are usually throwing it around a bit.

ANNA: (*Interrupting before POLLY gets completely out of hand.*) Mr. Scrooge, sir—what might we put you down for?

SCROOGE: Nothin'.

ANNA: Oh, that *is* sweet—you wish to give anonymously? If that isn't the most—

SCROOGE: I wish to be left alone! Since you asked what I want, that's my answer. Those who are bad off can either sit in jail. Or make themselves useful mining silver to spend right here in this saloon.

POLLY: Many would rather die.

SCROOGE: Well, then they'd best hurry up and do it. Folks movin' into this new state are causin' enough problems already. Thank you for stoppin' in. Closing time. (*He pulls down the roller shade inside the cage.*)

The two ladies leave in a huff, followed by just about everyone else. As the door clears of the last customer, KLAUS starts to leave also, only to be stopped by a group of CAROLERS right in the doorway.

CAROLERS:

GOD REST YOU, MERRY GENTLEMEN,
LET NOTHING YOU DIS—

KLAUS ducks, again, as SCROOGE fires one quick shot, knocking the hats off all four CAROLERS at once. They gather their hats and composure and scurry away. He turns around to find CRATCHIT standing right behind him, poised for his exit and a last request.

SCROOGE: I suppose you'll be wantin' to take the day off tomorrow, Bob?

BOB: Uh, right.

SCROOGE: The entire day?

BOB: Uh, yes sir, if it's convenient, what with it bein' Christmas day and no one likely to come in since Rudolph – er – passed away earlier today.

SCROOGE: (*Putting his gun back into his holster.*) And you'll want to be paid, I suppose?

BOB: If it's at all possib—

SCROOGE: A piss-poor excuse for pickin' a man's pocket every 25th of December! Be here all the earlier the next morning!

BOB: Thank you sir! I will sir! (*BOB makes his way toward the door.*)
And a Merry—

SCROOGE turns and puts his hand on his gun, so BOB disappears. SCROOGE triple locks the sliding door and turns down the lamps. He ladles himself some chili from a pot on the stove and sits at a table near the stage in near darkness, watching out the window as he eats, listening to far away carolers. Small groups of people pass by the window, some with gifts, others with food, some meeting a loved one and sharing an embrace.

SCROOGE: (*Quietly.*) Humbug!

SCROOGE clears his bowls to the bar, lights a lantern, then makes his way upstairs to his room when, on the wall half-way up the stairs, a portrait of Miss Marley seems to become dimensional, pushing out toward him, startling him. He fumbles for his key as he rushes past and gets inside, slamming the door. The carolers congregate outside the window with their backs to it. They finish their carol and see each other off.

After a moment of silence, we hear a single note on the player piano or piano. SCROOGE sticks his head slowly out of his door, lantern in hand. It was nothing. He closes the door. Again, after some silence, the piano tinkles a bit. SCROOGE throws his door open, comes out in his slippers, cap, and dressing gown, gun drawn. He checks each of the other upstairs rooms, the portrait at the stairs, then starts to make his way down the stairs. He checks the cage, behind the bar, then the triple locks on the front door. As he does so, every portrait in the place becomes identical to the Jackie Marley portrait, glowing brightly as the piano begins to play softly, growing louder, with other pianos playing different carols, increasing in volume and then suddenly it is quiet. Just as SCROOGE begins to recover from the scare, he hears the shuffle of cards—softly at first, then increasing in volume and joined by the constant sound of coins being dropped in a pile. The door that was Scrooge's room begins to brighten when suddenly the door is thrown

open and the backlit ghost of MISS JACKIE MARLEY steps out on the landing, [optional] fog rolling in from behind her, her chin held up by a piece of gauze tied around the top of her head in a fabulous bow. She looks just like the portrait next to her, except all gray and dusty. SCROOGE aims his gun at her and, with one gesture, she makes it fly from his hand.

MARLEY: Well?

SCROOGE: Who in tarnation are you?

MARLEY: *(As she comes down the stairs.)* Oh, you still don't have any gentlemanly manners. *(A pause.)* Well, you might as well ask me who I was.

SCROOGE: *(Sneering, but terrified.)* All right, who were you, then?

MARLEY: Now, there's no need to get snotty. In life I was your partner right here in this saloon, runnin' that stage show over there—Miss Jackie Marley. And, by the way, that stage show is the sorriest piece of entertainment this side of the Mississippi. You better whip that show into shape.

SCROOGE: *(After a humble pause.)* Can you sit down?

MARLEY: Of course I can.

She stands at the table and waits. SCROOGE finally gets the hint and pulls out a chair for her. She sits. Then he sits.

I reckon you don't believe I'm really here, now, do you?

SCROOGE: *(Unsure, but tough.)* Nope.

MARLEY: Why on earth...can't you see me sittin' here? Can't you hear me talkin' to ya?

SCROOGE: Well, I had some of that old chili tonight for dinner, and I place ten-to-one odds that it's been in that pot a little too long and I think it's comin' back to haunt me like it sometimes does. Sometimes I eat a handful of jalapeno peppers and I think I'm seein' the devil. Food'll mess with ya like that.

As MARLEY unleashes a dreadful shriek, causing lights to flicker!

Mercy! *(It all stops.)* What the heck is goin' on?!

MARLEY: So, do you believe I'm really here?

SCROOGE: Sure, sure, yeah. But why are you *here* instead of, oh, I don't know, down in the cemetery with all them other dead folks?!

MARLEY: Sit up in that chair and listen for a spell. (*She goes to the bar for a bottle of whiskey and a glass as she explains herself.*) It is required that, while you're still alive and kickin', you take yerself around town, your *spirit* around town, and spread a little happiness somewhere. If you don't, you gotta fly around after you're dead, peeking in at what you missed. (*She pours herself a drink while crossing back to him—at one point releasing the glass while pouring and it floats in mid-air, still filling with whiskey, stunning SCROOGE! See Production Notes.*) You know, I always liked jewelry because it was made of silver and gold—something that held value. Always lookin' for what was valuable is what my problem was. But these heavy chains ain't what I had in mind for eternity! (*Starts to drink but can't.*) Habit - I can't even drink nothin' now. Here, *you* have it - you look like you could use it. (*SCROOGE downs it in one gulp.*)

SCROOGE: OK. Jackie. Tell me more. Say something nice instead of all this death talk.

MARLEY: I have nothing nice to say, Ebenezer. I can't rest. I can't set still in one place very long at all. I can't linger anywhere—not even for one drink. My *spirit* never really left this saloon while I was alive and kickin', so now my spirit must roam, unsettled as a tarantula skittering across a scorchin' desert.

SCROOGE: So, what you're sayin' is that you've been wanderin' around out in the sagebrush the last seven years? (*She starts to wail at the thought of it.*) But you were always real sharp in business! Why you—

MARLEY: *Business!* Payin' some closer attention to people should've been my *business*. Countin' cards and stackin' poker chips were just a drop in my business bucket. The rest I should've filled up with a little kindness, a little... I don't know... *mercy*, Ebenezer. A little mercy. (*A pause.*) Listen up here, now—I'm gonna be yanked from here quicker than a can-can girl can kick her nose. Next thing you know I'll be plopped right down in Elko or Austin.

SCROOGE: I'm all ears, Jackie. Just... be easy on me.

MARLEY: Easy? Nonsense! (*Making her way upstairs.*) Ebenezer, I don't know exactly what happened tonight that you can even see me—I've stood invisible next to you over in that cashier's cage for

days on end. The only thing I can figure is that I am here to warn ya.

SCROOGE: You've always been a true friend, Jackie. What do I have to do?

MARLEY: Well, what you do is up to you. I'm just here to tell you that you're due for a little visit.

SCROOGE: A visit?

MARLEY: Well, honestly, it's gonna be three visits before it's all said and done. Listen, now! Three ghosts are gonna stop into this saloon, one at a time, to wet their whistles—so to speak.

SCROOGE: We're not open.

MARLEY: Now, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE: All right! But can they all come at the same time so I can just get it over with?

MARLEY: Nope. The first little ghostie is comin' when the clock strikes one in the morning.

SCROOGE: And the next one?

MARLEY: Two in the mornin'.

SCROOGE: —and the last one at three, I reckon.

MARLEY: Listen, Ebenezer honey, you're being dealt a final hand here—play your cards right, now, or you'll be singing a Christmas carol you won't soon forget. Well, gotta fly, Ebenezer.

The door she entered from flies open and she is drawn back into a terrific white light and fog mixture, then the door slams shut and it is silent—for a moment...

SCROOGE: Bah. Hum—

He is interrupted by the door flying open again and MARLEY making one final appearance.

MARLEY: *(In a frightful voice!)* Ebenezer Scrooge! Don't make me come back down there, now.

She disappears again in the same fashion. SCROOGE pours another drink, sips it, looks back at the door, then downs it.

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE: *After a moment of silence, we hear the piano tinkling out an eerie carol. The lights come up and we discover SCROOGE sitting at the same table, this time with the empty bottle and glass before him, asleep across the top of the table. Suddenly, the playing stops and we hear some huge distant clock strike one. SCROOGE wakes up with a snort, startled.*

SCROOGE: *Wha—? (Out of breath.)* Nothin'. Maybe it was all just a bad dream, or *(As he tries to pour himself a drink out of the empty bottle.)* ...empty. Bah, Hum— *(“Bug” is interrupted by a single shot from a shotgun, the force of which blows open one of the doors at the top of the stairs and we discover The Ghost of Christmas PAST, framed in some fog and light. She is a young Annie Oakley type—trousers, braids and cowboy hat. The tip of her rifle is glowing and then fades out.)* Are you the ghost that Jackie told me about?

PAST: *(Gently, in spite of her grand entrance.)* Yessir. *(Coming down the stairs.)* I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE: Whose past?

PAST: Why, yours, silly. Now, Mr. Scrooge, sir, I would like you to come over here out of the way and I'll show you a little something. Hurry, now, I haven't got much time.

SCROOGE: How old are you?

PAST: Old enough.

SCROOGE: Well, now. Why don't you hand me that rifle, little gal, before you get hurt with it.

PAST: *(A little too innocently.)* Well, I don't know why I didn't think of that. You're right, Mr. Scrooge. Why, a *little gal* like me probably doesn't know how to handle a rifle *(She shoots a portrait on the wall and it swings.)* It would be a shame if someone were to get hurt *(She shoots a bottle on the bar and it shatters. See Production*

Notes.) I think you (*Gesturing at him with it now.*) probably should just take it and keep us both safe.

SCROOGE: (*He decides to allow her to keep it, of course.*) What is it you're here to show me?

PAST: Open your eyes and you'll see.

The tip of the gun glows brightly and PAST waves it grandly across the empty stage. The curtains open with some piano fanfare, revealing a young SCROOGE sitting at a desk, alone. Throughout the play, the ghosts reveal scenes from the past, present, and future right up on the stage. Settings should be kept to a minimum, perhaps only a few pieces of furniture and some hand props. The lighting should give the effect of SCROOGE watching a show—footlights give a great effect. At times, SCROOGE joins the action on stage, although no one sees him.

SCROOGE: I know this place! This is the school in the little town where I grew up.

PAST: Do you reckon you know that little boy over there?

SCROOGE: I might.

OFFSTAGE VOICES: Adios! See you after Christmas!

SCHOOLMARM: (*From offstage.*) Ebenezer! (*Entering.*) Isn't there anyone coming to get you? I can't sit here all day waiting. My sister out in Dayton is waiting on me for Christmas dinner. (*No response.*) Well? Is anyone coming, or not?

YOUNG SCROOGE: I suppose someone will come—it is Christmas, after all.

SCHOOLMARM: Well, they'd better hurry it up. When my coach is ready, I'm leavin'—whether you're still sittin' here readin' or not! (*Exits.*)

FAN: (*Entering.*) Ebenezer!

YOUNG SCROOGE: Fan!

FAN: (*Giving him a kiss.*) Come on, Ebenezer! We're here to take you back out to the ranch!

YOUNG SCROOGE: The ranch?

FAN: Yup. Pappy is much nicer now than he used to be since the cattle are finally bringing in some money, and one night last week I asked him if you could come home for Christmas. He finally said yes, so I hitched a ride into town with the Pony Express driver. He's

down in the mercantile right now and he'll be ready to go soon. I'm so glad you're comin' home, Ebenezer! Let's grab your bag—we're headin' out! *(They both exit as the scene recedes, the curtain falls, and footlights dim.)*

SCROOGE: Oh, that Fan sure was a great little gal. Not very strong, mind you, but very giving.

PAST: She died as a young woman—on a cattle drive of all places—but she had a child, didn't she, Ebenezer?

SCROOGE: *(Quieter.)* One.

PAST: That's right. Your nephew, Fred.

SCROOGE: Yes. That's right.

PAST: Hmm. *(After a short pause.)* Well, we sure can't linger here with every memory, can we? We'll run out of time! Take a look up here at this! *(Gun tip glows as PAST gestures with it across the stage, bringing the curtain up on a frozen FEZZIWIG, plump and happy.)* Do you know this place? *(The footlights begin to glow.)*

SCROOGE: Why, my first job was right in this saloon, Fezziwig's Poker House!

FEZZIWIG: *(Exploding to life.)* Ebenezer!

SCROOGE and YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: *(As YOUNG MAN SCROOGE enters from off stage.)* Right here! *(SCROOGE has started toward the stage, thinking at first that FEZZIWIG was calling him.)*

FEZZIWIG: Where's Dick?

DICK: *(Entering the stage with decorations.)* Coming, sir!

FEZZIWIG: Ahh, good, ya found the decorations for the Christmas party! Get busy, boys! *(They do—the decorations spreading from the proper stage area on down off the stage and into the saloon as well.)* Mrs. Fezziwig? Mrs. Fezziwig?!

MRS. FEZZIWIG: *(Entering in all her largesse.)* I was making sure the fiddler was fixin' to play for the party. He arrived late on the stage today and I wasn't sure he was going to show up! Imagine! What kind of a party would that be—no fiddler? Well, he made it here just fine, no problems along the way. Why, he even said he enjoyed the ride, in spite of the snowstorm that blew in. A white Christmas! I don't recall the last time we had a little weather for the holiday season! Do you? *(FEZZIWIG has been trying to get a word in the entire time, and no such luck now, either.)* I remember once, when

I was nothing but a wispy little girl, we had such a snowstorm blow in from the Sierra we nearly had to postpone Christmas altogether! Ebenezer, hang that one straighter! You don't want your gal to think you just plain can't see straight! What's her name again, dear?

YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: B— (*Cutoff, he finishes decorating as PARTIERS enter randomly.*)

MRS. FEZZIWIG: Belle, of course. How could I forget? (*She continues about, a flurry of jovial bossiness, fixing this and that along the way.*) Belle is so darling! Just prettier than a prize pig all dressed up for dinner! (*All activity stops at this somewhat inappropriate description.*) Her skin, so shiny and . . . perfect is what I meant. (*ALL remain still.*) And always in the loveliest gowns in all the state of Nevada! (*ALL continue their own business.*) Now, where can that fiddler be? I know he had a long ride here, but people have started arriving and there should be music! Fiddler! Oh, fiddler man! (*As she exits backstage, hollering.*) Stick that cat gut to those strings, young man!

Her voice trails off and we hear a solo fiddle begin a square dance number. A musician coming onstage to play would be great, but implying that he's offstage is fine, too. Soon, there are four couples dancing away, then replaced by FEZZIWIG and MRS. FEZZIWIG, kicking their heels up together. They dance broadly and comically for a spell, and then are joined by all the guests, right up until the end of the song. Everyone laughs and parts center stage, the audience and SCROOGE discovering BELLE who has entered the party, much to YOUNG MAN SCROOGE'S delight.

BELLE: Merry Christmas, Ebenezer!

YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: Merry Christmas, Belle! (*They embrace and maybe kiss for a spell.*) You know Dick Wilkins?

BELLE: Of course—Merry Christmas, Dick. It's nice to see you again. Doesn't Mr. Fezziwig throw the best Christmas party in the whole town?

DICK: He sure does! I've never had a boss as nice as he is!

YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: (*Raising a glass.*) To Mr. Fezziwig!

DICK: Bottoms up!

PAST: It really is such a silly little thing to throw this party, ain't it?

SCROOGE: Silly?

PAST: Why, sure. I don't think he spent more than a few dollars on the whole fiesta.

SCROOGE: It's not the money he spends that matters. Just look how happy he's made everyone—that's what matters.

PAST: (*Knowingly.*) Really? Hmmm.

SCROOGE: What?

PAST: Oh, nothin'—let's move on. (*She points her rifle at the stage. There is a change of scene. The lights dim upstage as the Fezziwig party actors exit, leaving YOUNG MAN SCROOGE and BELLE alone near the footlights. Time has passed since the party and we sense that YOUNG MAN SCROOGE has grown a little older and changed. BELLE has been crying.*)

BELLE: It doesn't matter. (*SHE starts to leave.*) To you. It doesn't matter to you. I am no longer a part of your heart. You hold something else in your heart.

YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: What?

BELLE: Money.

YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: There is nothin' wrong with makin' a little money, Belle. Honey, listen, I've been poor—I never want to go back to that again.

BELLE: I know you've been poor. When we first fell in love, you were poor. I was poor. It didn't matter to us. *I* haven't changed. (*A beat.*) Money doesn't matter to me. You matter. You were going to be a great man. Now you're happy enough to be a rich man. So...I'll let you go. Pursue your wealth.

YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: Have I ever asked you to let me go?

BELLE: In words? No.

YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: Well, then why on earth do you think I'm wantin' to be let go now?

BELLE: Your... *spirit* has changed, Ebenezer. Tell me—if we were only now just meeting, would you pursue me?

YOUNG MAN SCROOGE: (*Quietly.*) You think I wouldn't.

BELLE: I would like to think you would. In my heart, I know you would rather chase silver than chase me. (*YOUNG MAN SCROOGE and SCROOGE are both about to speak, but—*) I can only hope that some memory of this moment hurts you sometime. Only then will you know that I meant something to you. Goodbye. I hope you and

your money have a long life together. (*Footlights fade to black as BELLE and YOUNG MAN SCROOGE disappear into the darkness upstage.*)

SCROOGE: Oh, enough! (*SCROOGE starts toward the stairs and his room.*) Let me go to bed. I don't understand why you have to show me such—

PAST: Hold it! (*She raises her rifle.*) No so fast! Back down them stairs. (*He does, slowly.*) Come here. I've got one more little number to show you on that stage before you scurry your scrawny backside to bed.

SCROOGE: (*After a pause.*) Nope. (*He starts even more quickly up the stairs and is almost there when PAST lets loose with a single shot of her rifle, straight up in the air. A bit of dust falls.*) All right, just one more and then (*Fake yawn.*) I have just got to get myself into bed. I—

PAST: That's enough. Get down here, hush up, and pay attention.

On the stage, we discover BELLE, older, surrounded by her children. The scene is one of joyous chaos, and BELLE couldn't be happier.

CHILDREN: (*Dividing lines among them.*). Ma! Ma! When will Pa get home? Will he bring the presents? How many presents will each of us get? I'm so excited! I can't wait for Christmas dinner!

BELLE'S HUSBAND enters with his arms loaded with wrapped gifts. The children squeal with delight. The oldest daughter puts her arms around him and kisses his cheek before exiting with the rest of the children and their gifts, chattering away.

BELLE'S HUSBAND: (*Kisses her.*) Belle. You'll never guess in a thousand years who I saw today!

BELLE: Who?

BELLE'S HUSBAND: An oooooold friend. . .

BELLE: (*A beat.*) Ebenezer Scrooge.

BELLE'S HUSBAND: Mr. Scrooge himself. I passed by the saloon and, even though he was open for business, nobody was inside except himself and Jackie Marley on her deathbed for crying out loud! His business partner is about to kick the bucket and he sits

there all alone, counting his silver coins. (*Their conversation continues silently while they exit and the footlights dim over the next few lines.*)

SCROOGE: Listen, ghostie girl! I'm going to bed! I can't stand here and—

PAST: These are shadows of the past, Ebenezer! I can't change them. They are what they are!

SCROOGE: Well, just the same, I can't stand it any longer!

PAST: So be it. (*PAST walks right past SCROOGE on the stairs and opens the door to the room she came out of.*) Enjoy what remains of your evenin', Ebenezer. (*She aims the gun at him. He falls into a dead faint.*) Goodnight. (*Her door opens and she retreats into light and fog. The door shuts and we hear SCROOGE snore just before the lights fall.*)

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