

*He's giggling uncontrollably.*

CAROLINE. What is it? Is it a pig?

FRED. Ha! No.

MISS GRUB. Oh! I know! I have found it out! I know what it is!

FRED. What?

MISS GRUB. It's your Uncle Scrooge!

FRED *nods and laughs.*

*The company burst out laughing but the smile is wiped from SCROOGE's face.*

*He turns away sadly.*

TOPPER (offstage). I call foul!

CAROLINE (offstage). Why, Mr Topper?

TOPPER. Because Mr Chokepear there asked if it were a bear and Fred said 'no'!

*They laugh again. SCROOGE is downcast then suddenly notices the change in the GHOST. Its hair is snow-white and its ruddy face lined with age.*

SCROOGE. Spirit, you are... Are... are spirits' lives so short?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. My life upon this globe is very brief. It ends tonight.

SCROOGE. Tonight!

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Tonight at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near!

P

*Scene Six*

*They're suddenly outside. The GHOST looks haggard and weary. SCROOGE looks down at the spirit's robe again.*

SCROOGE. Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it. Look here.

*He unfolds his robe. Clinging to his bare ankles are a BOY and a GIRL. But so wretched, wolfish, horrible are they that they scarcely seem human. Their flesh is yellow and pinched, their eyes dull, their mouths slaving maws.*

*Yet they are pathetic and feeble too.*

SCROOGE gasps and falls back, appalled.

SCROOGE. What... what delightful children... you must be very pr—

*He can't go on pretending.*

Spirit! Are they yours?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. They are Man's! And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both but most of all beware this boy!

SCROOGE. Have they no refuge or resource?

*And the wretched children and the strange, feral GHOST loom over him once last time.*

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Are there no prisons?  
Are there no workhouses? ARE THERE NO PRISONS? ARE  
THERE NO WORKHOUSES?

*The church clock strikes twelve with a tremendous percussion.*

**ACT THREE****Scene One**

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT *as before on his throne of food and goodies. There's something delightfully boozy and Falstaffian about the GHOST's ruddy face, but there's an edge to him too, a manic, carnal glint in the eye that speaks more of the Pagan Green Man than of Santa Claus...*

SCROOGE *edges his way in. The GHOST raises a blazing torch, like a Horn of Plenty.*

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. You have never seen the likes of me before!

SCROOGE. Never!

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. I am the Ghost of Christmas Present.

SCROOGE. I guessed as much.

*The GHOST downs a huge goblet of wine. Most of it spills down his beard and chest.*

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. And yet you have not walked abroad with any of my brothers, my elder brothers, have you, you weird little man?

SCROOGE. How... how many brothers do you have?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. More than eighteen hundred!

SCROOGE. A tremendous family to provide for! I suppose you must have independent means –

*The GHOST silences him with a glare. Then laughs heartily and stuffs pie into his mouth.*

SCROOGE. Spirit, conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion and I learnt a lesson which is... working now. Tonight, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Touch my robe.

SCROOGE *does so and the room changes...*

### Scene Two

*A beautiful, crisp Christmas morning. The shops are all opening up and it's a riot of colour and noise. French plums and fresh coffee and Spanish onions and puddings galore.*

*Snow is being scraped away from doorways and families are making their happy way to church. Bells peal madly and everywhere people are wishing each other 'a merry Christmas'.*

*The GHOST – colossally tall – sprinkles droplets of moisture from his torch onto all of them. SCROOGE looks on, intrigued.*

*An aproned WAITER rushes from a baker's shop to his restaurant and almost collides with a SECOND WAITER.*

WAITER. Mind yesself, you great useless article, afore I horse-whip ya!

SECOND WAITER. H'I should like to see you try! H'Ive 'ad ha bellyful of your threats to hassassinate me!

*They come face to face, blazing with anger. The GHOST drifts past and sprinkles more droplets on them.*

WAITER (*beaming*). Mind you, on account of the day, it seems out of keeping to –

SECOND WAITER. Quite right, 'arry, my lad. A merry Christmas to you and yours!