

SCROOGE Is this a flag-seller I see before me, his collecting-tin towards my hand? Come! Let me clutch thee!

GENTLEMAN Thelma!

SCROOGE Oh, I want to give, give, give! But I can't hang around all day, spreading joy and cheer. As I believe you know, old flag seller, the vicar thinks that I ought to be in the West End.

*He stands in front of the GENTLEMAN, masking him with theatrical gestures. The GENTLEMAN pushes him to one side.*

GENTLEMAN My dear sir, I don't know what to say...

SCROOGE Then say nothing. My conscience has been pricked and I can only hope this pricking will continue.

GENTLEMAN I think I can help you out there. *(He jabs one of the flags into SCROOGE)*

SCROOGE Ow! You beast!

*Blackout. Music: "WHITE CHRISTMAS".*

SCROOGE and the GENTLEMAN exit. *The lights come up above the gauze on MR and MRS CRATCHIT sitting (on one chair) at their table. They are dabbing at their lips with napkins.*

Start

CRATCHIT That was the most delicious Christmas dinner I have ever tasted.

MRS CRATCHIT Did you find that the rich, brown gravy had an excitingly different flavour?

CRATCHIT Yes. Is it a new recipe?

MRS CRATCHIT Surprisingly it's a revival of a traditional favourite. I took two ounces of diced ham and browned it in an ounce of fat with a bayleaf, a blade of mace, two cloves—

SCROOGE enters.

SCROOGE All right, don't make a meal of it.

MRS CRATCHIT A piece of parsley root—

SCROOGE Put a sock in it!

MRS CRATCHIT Oh, yes. I put some stock in it, and I let it stew for half an hour—

SCROOGE Merry Christmas, everyone!

CRATCHIT Why, it's Mr Scrooge.

SCROOGE Did you like the turkey?

CRATCHIT Yes, it was—

SCROOGE I'm going to raise your salary, Cratchit, and then I'm going to buy you two new houses and fill them both with priceless antiques and old masters.

MRS CRATCHIT I hadn't finished the recipe.

SCROOGE We'd had enough of it. Now—

MRS CRATCHIT *(very quickly)* It's excellent with venison.

SCROOGE Where's that lovely boy of yours, Tiny Tim?

MRS CRATCHIT *(very quickly)* You can put it in the freezer.

CRATCHIT He's upstairs unwrapping his Christmas presents.

MRS CRATCHIT *(very quickly)* And you can re-heat it later. That's it.

SCROOGE Well, I'm sure Tiny Tim won't want to come down and join us, so instead—

TINY TIM *hobbles in speedily with a Christmas parcel.* End

TINY TIM Well, that's where you're mistaken. Thank you for my present, Mr Scrooge.

MRS CRATCHIT What did he get you, darling?

TINY TIM An acting award.

SCROOGE I didn't.