THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS

by

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By Les Standiford)

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THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS

FADE IN:

1  CARD: NEW YORK CITY. JUNE. 1841

In darkness we hear:

DICKENS (V.O.)
Dear Forster... How can I give you the faintest notion of my reception here in America?

2  OMIT

3  OMIT

4  INT. DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A STAGE MANAGER knocks and calls out in a Brooklyn accent:

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
Five minutes...five minutes

Ink stained fingers fumble with silver CUFF LINKS. A pair of BOOTS is smartly buffed. A brightly coloured SILK SCARF is adjusted.

DICKENS (V.O.)
Of the crowds that pour in and out the whole day; of the people that line the streets when I go out...

In the mirror, the writer (CHARLES DICKENS) looking like an English rock star in his prime (silk blouse, tight trousers, velvet jacket), fusses with the locks on his forehead, then steps back and regards himself critically.

DICKENS (V.O.)
....of the balls, dinners, speeches, parties, assemblies without end. There never was a king or Emperor upon the Earth, so cheered.

He breaks into a wide grin.

DICKENS
‘Ello, Charlie.

Another knock at the door breaks the moment.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)
Places, please. Places.
DICKENS (V.O.)
I have had deputations from the Far West, who have come from more than two thousand miles distance.

INT. PARK THEATER. CORRIDOR & STAGE- CONTINUOUS

Dickens moves along the corridor. The sounds of the crowd stomping their feet and clapping their hands gets louder as he nears the stage.

DICKENS (V.O.)
They come from the lakes, the rivers, the back-woods, the log-houses, the cities, factories, villages and towns-

A PRESENTER is making a flowery introduction on stage. The sound of the crowd is deafening.

PRESENTER
....The great magician of our time, whose wand is a book. The Shakespeare of the novel. The people's author.

Dickens reaches the wings. He breathes in deeply through his nose, steadying himself. He nods at the Stage Manager.

STAGE MANAGER
Ready?

DICKENS
Ready.

PRESENTER (O.S.)
... the one and only, the inimitable, the great and marvellous Boz! Ladies and gentlemen- Mr. Charles Dickens!

The stagehands raise the curtain. Dickens takes a deep breath and steps into the light. At the sight of him, the audience rises to its feet as one.

Behind him "TABLEAUX VIVANTS" appear, depicting sights and scenes of London, Beef Eaters roll out canons, characters from Oliver Twist come to life, urchins dance along to the band.

Dickens taking this in.
DICKENS (V.O.)
Americans are friendly, earnest, hospitable, kind, frank, accomplished, warm-hearted, fervent and enthusiastic...

Uncertainly, he raises his arms above his head. The crowd goes wilder still, BLANKETING the stage with flowers and SCREAMING “BOZ, BOZ, BOZ”.

Dickens attempts to speak to the crowd.

DICKENS
Dear friends, you have welcomed me to your country with such open arms that I fear that I-

But his speech is cut off by a deafening volley as the cannons behind him fire ticker tape into the air. Dickens shrinks, covering his ears.

DICKENS (V.O.)
I can’t wait to get home.

TITLE CARD: LONDON, OCTOBER, 1843

SIXTEEN MONTHS LATER

INT. DICKENS STUDY - MORNING

Dickens sits at his desk, pen in hand, in front of a blank piece of paper, as if willing something to appear.

After a moment, he throws the pen down and gets up to look in the mirror, making a face.

He picks up an ACCORDION and plays a few squeaky NOTES.

DICKENS
(sings)
Yanky doodle, doodle dandy
Turn right round in the bottom of the gangy-

There is a tentative KNOCK at the door. He throws it open in frustration.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Mrs. Fisk. I have told you repeatedly not to disturb me when I’m working.
MRS. FISK, the housekeeper, a rather severe Scotswoman, is taken aback.

MRS. FISK
I beg your pardon sir. Only, Mr. Forster is here.

Beat.

DICKENS
I’ll be right down.

INT. DICKENS HOUSE/HALLWAY - MORNING

The front hall is full of workmen, including the energetic SIGNOR MAZZINI, who is busy directing traffic, as various of the DICKENS CHILDREN run in and out of the chaos.

SIGNOR MAZZINI
Adesso! Subito! Veni qui!

Kate gives a tour to Dickens’ friend and de facto literary manager, JOHN FORSTER -- a big, pleasant-looking man with a Geordie accent.

KATE
You see, Mr. Forster, we’re having all new wallpaper. French. New doors, new roller blinds for the windows, new book-cases in the library, all chosen by Charles, of course. And the staircase is to be painted green
(to Signor Mazzini)
– though not too dull a green, Signor Mazzini.

SIGNOR MAZZINI
Si, si. Capice.

KATE
(to Forster)
You know how Charles is.

FORSTER
The best is good enough for me!

KATE
I wish he’d redecorate that study of his. It’s like an animal’s den. But he won’t let anyone touch it!

Two workmen pass between them carrying a large chandelier.
Scusi.
KATE
Mr. Forster. If you will allow me: how do things stand between you and Miss Wigmore?

FORSTER
Splendid, Mrs. Dickens. In fact, I intend to ask her to bestow upon me the greatest happiness a man can ever know.

Kate stares at him, uncomprehending.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
To marry me.

KATE
Oh!

She embraces him, causing him to flush a deep crimson.

KATE (CONT’D)
I am very glad to hear it.

Dickens comes thundering down the stairs.

DICKENS
Forster. Good Lord. I completely lost track of the time.

Kate puts out a hand.

KATE
Charles. We need to pay Signor Mazzini. For the parlour mantle.

DICKENS
How much?

SIGNOR MAZZINI
Seventy-five pounds.

Dickens staggers back.

DICKENS
Seventy-five – what is it made of, gold?

SIGNOR MAZZINI
Carrara marble, Signor. Finest quality. No gentleman would accept less.

Beat.
DICKENS
I’ll have the money for you when I return, Signor Mazzini.

Dickens turns to Forster.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Shall we?

Forster bows to Kate.

FORSTER
Good day, Mrs. Dickens.

KATE
Good day, Mr. Forster.

Dickens is nearly out the door, where a WORKMAN is busy attaching a shiny new knocker.

FORSTER
I’ll hail us a cab.

DICKENS
Waste of money. We’ll walk.

FORSTER
Walk? Are you mad?

Dickens rushes out, followed by Forster. They head down the street at pace, the London skyline in the distance.

DICKENS
The best way to lengthen our days is to walk steadily and with a purpose.

INT. CHAPMAN AND HALL. OUTER OFFICE - DAY

A publishing house in The Strand. In the outside office, a nervous young CLERK listens to a heated conversation in the other room.

FORSTER (O.S.)
Gentlemen, we don’t seem to understand one another. I asked you a simple question: where is the money?

CHAPMAN (O.S.)
The money, Mr. Forster—
FORSTER (O.S.)
Yes. Money. You know: Pounds, shillings, stumpy, shiners, joeys—

A huge CRASH, then silence. The clerk winces.

INT. CHAPMAN AND HALL. INNER OFFICE - DAY

Forster stands by an overturned tea trolley. Crockery everywhere. He gestures apologetically at the two publishers, CHAPMAN (rather portly and florid) and HALL (tall and angular).

FORSTER
I do apologize.

He attempts to pick up the broken crockery.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
Bull in a china shop.

CHAPMAN
Please don’t trouble yourself.

Forster resumes his tirade.

FORSTER
Charles Bloody Dickens! The best-selling bloody author in the history of English bloody literature—

He gestures towards Dickens. Dickens’ lips are pressed together, his attention on a magazine publication. The headline on it reads “Martin Chuzzlewit, A Tedious Journey.”

FORSTER (CONT’D)
Three of his books you’ve published in the last year and a half. Three. So— where is the money?

CHAPMAN
Mr. Forster. Like you, we are as Puzzled as the Egyptians in their Fog.

FORSTER
Howzat?

HALL
The Excitement with which a Popular Reputation is Kept up to the Highest Selling Mark will always be Subject to Lulls too Capricious for Explanation.
FORSTER
Ahm still not followin’.

CHAPMAN
—Martin Chuzzlewit— a Masterpiece of the Picaresque Genre— and Yet—

HALL
Barnaby Rudge— a Fine Book— an Important Subject— But— alas—

CHAPMAN
And The Travel book— “American Notes”—

HALL
Perhaps— a Little Too Candid for our American Cousins—

FORSTER
No joke. I heard they were burning copies in the streets.

Forster notices Dickens pained look.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
Mad as snakes, the Yanks.

Forster renews his attack.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
And what about this fifty pounds a month you’re withholding from his royalties? What’s the explanation for that?

The two publishers squirm uncomfortably. Chapman produces the contract and peers at it to cover his nervousness.

HALL
You May Remember that when Mr. Dickens Approached us about the Tour to America, we were Pleased to Provide Him with an Interest-Free Loan —

He falters. Chapman continues.

CHAPMAN
With the Provision That— In the Unlikely Case of Profits being Inadequate to Certain Repayments—

Forster erupts.
FORSTER
Oh, divven’t hoy me that ket, you sackless mairks.

The publishers exchange glances.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
So, he’s had a few flops, who hasn’t? Your publishing house wouldn't exist without this man!

Chapman gives Dickens a nervous look.

CHAPMAN
Actually, we do have a Suggestion—

HALL
— very Popular with the Reading Public —

CHAPMAN
Perhaps Mr. Dickens might consider—

HALL
— and a lot of Money to be Made in—

CHAPMAN
— a Railway Edition of his works?

Dickens is frowning.

FORSTER
You’re not serious? Those cheap yellow-backed jobs? With adverts for fig syrup on the cover?

They all watch as Dickens gets to his feet. He turns the magazine publication over to obscure his bad Chuzzlewit review.

DICKENS
What about an advance?

CHAPMAN
— on?

DICKENS
(bluffing)
...A new book.

HALL
You have a New Book in mind?

FORSTER
Of course he does...
CHAPMAN
Well, in that case, obviously. We’d Love to Consider it...

DICKENS
Consider it?

HALL
That is to say, If we Like it--

DICKENS
If?

CHAPMAN
I’m sure we will--

DICKENS
Gentlemen. I bid you good day.

He sweeps out of the room.

CHAPMAN
Mr. Forster: Please. We had no Intention of Causing Offense.

FORSTER
Ay. He’s in a fettle now. Give him a day to calm down –

HALL
And then... It's Most Awkward... “He” was in last week. In some Difficulty. Again.

FORSTER
No, that’s not possible. He’s in the countryside. Under strict instructions to remain there.

Beat.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
What is it this time?

Chapman hands him a letter and an envelope.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
(reading)
“...need money immediately or productive of fatal consequences...
I beseech you to do the needful...”

Forster shakes the envelope, causing several SLIPS OF PAPER to fall out, each one torn from a letter, each with a signature: Charles Dickens. Forster makes a face.
HALL
He’s been Offering Mr. Dickens’ Autographs for Sale in the Newspapers.

FORSTER
How much did you give him?

CHAPMAN
Forty-five, All Told.

FORSTER
Forty-five! — I’ll pay you back for it. Not a word of this to Charles, do you hear?

EXT. GARRICK CLUB – AFTERNOON
A Georgian building near Covent Garden, once a private house, now a gentlemen’s club, with a brass plate beside the door: THE GARRICK CLUB. And underneath, the motto: “ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE.” FORSTER rushes in, umbrella in hand.

INT. GARRICK CLUB. DINING ROOM – AFTERNOON
A cozy dining room, typical of a Victorian men’s club. Beside the bar, a group of SMART YOUNG MEN are gathered, gossiping and making quips. At the centre of the group is a tall fellow with a braying laugh (WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY).

Dickens stands by the cloak room, holding a newspaper in front of his face.

FORSTER (O.S.)
Charles?

Dickens folds down a corner of the newspaper.

DICKENS
Shhh...

FORSTER
What are you doing over here?

Dickens gestures towards the group.

DICKENS
I’m hiding. From Thackeray. He’ll want to commiserate with me on my Chuzzlewit reviews. Which he will quote by heart.

Forster walks into the dining room. Dickens scuttles after him, taking care not to be seen by Thackeray. Forster grabs a chair and cranes his head around.
FORSTER
Where’s Robertson? I’m clammin’ for some scran.

Dickens slinks into another chair.

DICKENS
Why do we come here? The service is terrible. The food is inedible. And the fees keep going up —

An elderly WAITER appears and bows low, losing his balance. He fixes his gaze somewhere above their heads.

WAITER
Gentlemen?

FORSTER
You’re not Robertson.

WAITER
The name is Marley, sir.

DICKENS
Marley?

Dickens gets out a pencil and a notebook.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
With an e?

The waiter’s eyes flicker with apprehension.

WAITER
Yes, sir.

FORSTER
Don’t worry. He collects names. Let’s have some oysters. And a bottle of champagne.

WAITER
Very good, sir.

The waiter exits, at a stately pace.

DICKENS
Champagne?

FORSTER
We’re celebrating.

THACKERAY (O.C.)
Celebrating?
Thackeray has somehow materialized at their table, an evil glint in his eyes.

DICKEY
Thackeray. How are you?

THACKERAY
Tolerable I thank ye. Charles. I must say, I’m relieved to see you out and about.

DICKEY
Relieved?

THACKERAY
You know. After those vile things they wrote about Chuzzlewit. I won’t even call them reviews.

DICKEY
No matter, I never read them.

Forster shoots him a skeptical look.

THACKERAY
Quite right. Scandalous, what one is allowed to print nowadays.

He waits. Dickens grits his teeth.

DICKEY
Why? What did they say?

THACKERAY
“Dull, vapid, and vulgar... Not a single character capable of exciting the reader’s sympathy.”

(beat)
I certainly didn’t think it was vulgar.

Dickens gives him a tight smile.

THACKERAY (CONT’D)
Oh, look! There’s Macready. Poor thing. His Macbeth was absolutely shredded in The Times. I must go and give him my condolences.

Thackeray wafts away to rejoin the group at the bar.

DICKEY
I’m sick of London. Over-crowded, over-priced—
FORSTER
-You love this town-

DICKENS
- no place for a man without money. Not to mention the bloody fog--

FORSTER

The waiter arrives. He opens the bottle with some difficulty, then bangs a plate of oysters down on the table and leaves.

DICKENS
I tell you, Forster, my lamp’s gone out. I’ve run out of ideas. I feel old.

FORSTER
Old. Whssht. You’re a puppy.

Forster pours some champagne.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
You’re exhausted, that’s what. Too many speeches.

DICKENS
I’ve got one tomorrow, for the Children’s Refuge.

FORSTER
You have to learn to say no.

DICKENS
How can I? If I can be useful.

FORSTER
You’ll have to. What with your new commission.

DICKENS
Forster, I just told you–

He stops himself.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
- what commission?

FORSTER
From Chapman and Hall. For your next book.

Forster grins and hands him a cheque.
FORSTER (CONT’D)
I told them you’d have the first chapter by the end of the year. You like a deadline.

Dickens stares at him.

DICKENS
Do you mind telling me what it’s about?

FORSTER
Oh, I leave that up to youse.

He grins and helps himself to the oysters.

14 INT. STUDY - NIGHT 14

Dickens goes through a complicated pre-writing ritual: straightening everything on his desk, paper, ink, pen knife, quills; then rapidly touching his desk ornaments one by one: a CUP with fresh flowers in it, a pair of BRONZE TOADS, a RABBIT, and a CERAMIC MONKEY.

He places a blank sheet in front of him, dips his pen in ink, then stares at the paper, once again willing something to appear.

INK drips slowly from the pen onto the page.

He hears a strange, unearthly cry coming from nearby.

VOICE (O.S.)
Ul-ul-alul-alu!

He opens the door, listening.

15 INT. DICKENS HOUSE. NURSERY - NIGHT 15

Dickens descends the stairs to the nursery. A young nursemaid, TARA is telling a bedtime story to the children in a soft Irish lilt.

TARA
... And on Christmas Eve, they say, the fairy mounds open wide, and the fire spirits pour into the night... and then the Lord of the Dead leads all of the spirits in a Wild Hunt. And he calls to them...

She throws back her head.

TARA (CONT’D)
Ul-ul-alul-alu!
CHARLIE age 10, Dickens’s oldest son, shivers with excitement and dread. Dickens lingers a moment, mesmerized.

INT. DICKENS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dickens is in bed, going through the accounts book, while Kate reads a book called Roughing it in the Bush.

DICKENS
Do we have a new housemaid?

KATE
What? Oh, yes. Tara. She’s Irish. Charley adores her.

The candle sputters. She lights a new one.

DICKENS
What are you doing?

She shows him the stub of the old candle.

KATE
It was only a stub.

DICKENS
There’s another hour in that.

KATE
Oh, really, Charles.

DICKENS
If you carry on like this, we’ll end up in the Poor House.

Kate laughs.

KATE
You are funny.

DICKENS
I’m not joking.

KATE
Charles. You give money to any and every beggar on the street. You insist on moving to a bigger house, and order all new fixtures, and then you complain about a new candle.

Dickens speaks with a fervid intensity.
DICKENS
I know whereof I speak, Kate. Debt is — an ogre. If you’re not careful it can eat you up.

Beat.

KATE
Are we in trouble?

DICKENS
No. Of course not.

KATE
Then what — ?

DICKENS
Nothing.

Beat.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
I’m sick of writing tooth and nail for bread, that’s all.

Kate has heard this before. She goes back to her book.

KATE
Mmmm...

DICKENS
I should have become a journalist.

KATE
You hate the press.

DICKENS
Or a lawyer.

KATE
“The law is an ass.” I believe you wrote that.

DICKENS
A hairdresser, then. In the Burlington Arcade. “Hair Shampooed on the Oxford system.”

Kate smiles.

KATE
Do you know what I should have liked to be?

Referring to her book—
KATE (CONT’D)
An explorer. Paddling a canoe.
Somewhere in the wilds of Canada.
In a pair of buckskin breeches...
All on my own... No nappies to change...

She glances at Dickens, lost in his own thoughts.

KATE (CONT’D)
By the way, dear... I saw the doctor today.

This gets his attention.

DICKENS
Not- another Little Stranger?

She smiles.

KATE
Are you pleased?

Beat.

DICKENS
Of course! Splendid.

He stares straight ahead for a moment, then blows out the light.

FLASHBACK:

INT. DICKENS CHILDHOOD HOME - EVENING

A match flares and touches the wick of a magic lantern.

VOICE (O.S.)
And now for this year’s Christmas present!

Above it, the genial face of a middle-aged man appears,(whom we will come to know as JOHN DICKENS). He is dressed in the elaborate headdress of a stage magician.

MR. DICKENS
I am the necromancer, Rhia Rhama Rhoos, educated cabalistically in the Orange Groves of Salamanca. Behold!

He CLAPS his hands, theatrically.

YOUNG CHARLES (AGE 10) and his six brothers and sisters are settled in front of a sheet hanging from the clothes horse.
Behind them we can see a table set for Christmas dinner with holly and mistletoe.

Mr. Dickens slips a painted slide into the magic lantern and an image appears on the sheet: an angel, hovering above a group of shepherds.

CHILDREN
Ohhh...

Then, a bearded hunter, with a stag over his shoulder.

CHILDREN(CONT’D)
Ahhhh....

Then, Aladdin and his lantern.

CHILDREN(CONT’D)
Hooray!

On the faces of the children, there is a look of utter enchantment, but most particularly Young Charles.

A terrifying ghost appears next. Young Charles covers his face with his hands.

YOUNG CHARLES
No. Go away.

Mr. Dickens puts his hand on the young boy’s head to comfort him.

Mr. DICKENS
It’s all right, Charlie. I’m here. You’re safe.

Young Charles climbs into his father’s arms.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)
Here. Now. I’ll show you how to get rid of bad spirits. Ready?

They CLAP their hands together. The light on the magic lantern goes out, and the Ghost disappears.

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING (PRESENT)

Dickens awakes from his dream. Beside him, Kate sleeps peacefully.

INT. PARLOUR - MORNING

The Dickens children, Charley, MAMIE (age 5), KATE (4), WALTER (age 3) line up for inspection. Dickens bowls in using a different voice to talk to each child, starting with Mamie.
Mistress Chickenstalker. How are you this fine morning?

She giggles.

What is the matter with your pinnie? It looks as if you have been caught in a cyclone.

She straightens it.

He moves on to Walter, standing as straight as he can. Dickens salutes.

Master Corporal Skittles. Sir.

He stares fixedly at Walter’s shoes.

Ahem.

The little boy self-consciously rubs one on the back of his leg. Dickens nods, approvingly. He moves on to Kate.

Hello, Lucifer Box.

Hello, Papa.

Dickens offers her his handkerchief.

Would you do me the honour?

She blows her nose.

He arrives at Charley, clinging to the leg of Tara.

A-ha. The Snodgering Blee. We meet at last.

Charley shrinks behind Tara.

Morning, Pa.

Dickens inspects him up and down.
DICKENS
Much better, sir. But... What’s this? You forgot to wash behind your ears.

Dickens pulls a coin from Charley’s ear, to his delight.

TARA
Cor!

Dickens turns his attention to Tara.

DICKENS
Tara, is it?

TARA
Yes, sir.

Dickens notes the look of adoration on Charley’s face.

Dickens
I see you’ve made a conquest.

Tara ruffles Charley’s hair.

Dickens (CONT’D)
What were you telling the children last night? About the fairies?

TARA
Only a story my gran used to tell us, sir. Back home in Ireland. She used to say that on Christmas Eve the veil between this world and the next thins out. And that’s when the spirits cross over, and walk among us.

Dickens reflects on this.

DICKENS
Do they indeed?

INT/EXT. FREEMASON’S HALL - NIGHT


Dickens walks out of the hall, shaking hands with a haughty Society Woman.
SOCIETY WOMAN #1
Thank you for coming. Such an interesting speech.

Another couple of SOCIETY LADIES go by, whispering.

SOCIETY LADY #2
... not nearly as handsome as I'd thought...

A red-faced industrialist, GRIMSBY, and his star-struck WIFE approach.

MRS. GRIMSBY
Oh, Mr. Dickens. It is such an honour to meet you.

Mr. Grimsby looks unimpressed.

MRS. GRIMSBY (CONT’D)
We just adore your books.

MR. GRIMSBY
No, I don’t.

MRS. GRIMSBY
Well, I love them.

MR. GRIMSBY
Nonsense. You just like a good cry.

Dickens gives him a strained smile.

DICKENS
What is it you particularly object to in my books?

MR. GRIMSBY
Pickpockets, streetwalkers, charity boys. Those people don’t belong in books.

DICKENS
Those people? You mean, the poor?

They continue outside the building where Dickens indicates to a knot of BARE-FOOT URCHINS, watching from the shadows. Grimsby straightens up.

MR. GRIMSBY
Look here, Mr. Dickens. I’m a self-made man. I pulled myself up by my own bootstraps, never asked for anything from anyone that I wasn’t willing to pay for.
DICKENS
No help from anyone?

MR. GRIMSBY
None.

MRS. GRIMSBY
Well, Papa did give us a very small cotton mill for our wedding.

Mr. Grimsby ignores this, whilst shoeing away a poor urchin begging for money.

DICKENS
What would you suggest we do about “those people”?

MR. GRIMSBY
Are there no workhouses?

DICKENS
Do you know that many people had rather die than go there?

MR. GRIMSBY
Then they had better do it, and reduce the surplus population.

Dickens struggles to control his temper.

DICKENS
Will you excuse me? I have a -- I must-- good evening.

He strides off.

EXT. LONDON STREETS - NIGHT

Dickens strides angrily through the chaotic, noisy streets of London, past WAITERS thrusting handbills into the hands of passersby, CABBIES soliciting fares, a BALLAD SINGER croaking out a tune, a barefooted CROSSING SWEEPER leaping into the street to clear away the manure.

A TOOTHLESS MAN in a long cloak approaches emerges out of the crowd and flashes Dickens a lop-sided grin.

TOOTHLESS MAN
Care to buy? Hard workers. Suitable for factory work or chimney sweeping.

Moving aside his cloak he reveals two CHILDREN, a boy and a girl, pale and emaciated, clinging to his legs. Dickens reels back in shock.
DICKENS

Let them go! Let them go, or I’ll have the police after you.

The man turns and runs, the children in tow. Dickens tries to give chase across the street, but is nearly knocked over by a large cart drawn by four horses. On the side the words are written: “Warren’s Blacking: The Pride of Mankind”.

Dickens freezes. He looks around. The toothless man and his children are gone. Hearing FOOTSTEPS, he gives chase down a darkened alleyway. Faster he goes, left, right, until he is completely disorientated.

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EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Turning a corner, Dickens finds himself in the graveyard of a church and collapses under a tree, exhausted. He closes his eyes.

VOICE #1 (O.S.)
I lift up mine eyes unto the hills
From whence cometh my help
My help cometh even from the Lord
Who hath made heaven and earth--

A gravelly voice cuts him off.

VOICE #2 (O.S.)
-- All right. I’m not paying you by the hour. Skip to the end.

Dickens opens his eyes. In the glow of a lantern, a grave-side burial is taking place, attended only by a red-nosed CLERIC in a threadbare black coat, and a LONE MOURNER in a black silk hat, and two stalwart GRAVE-DIGGERS.

CLERIC
(rapidly)
Rest eternal grant to him, O Lord:
And let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

LONE MOURNER

Amen.

The Lone Mourners presses a coin into the clergyman’s hand and strides away, clearly anxious to be gone.

The Grave-diggers shuffle towards the grave, spades in hand. Grave Digger #1 points towards the coffin.

GRAVE DIGGER #1
Shame, innit? All that money and no-one to mourn him.
GRAVE DIGGER #2
-- except Old Scratch there.

He nods towards the departing Lone Mourner.

GRAVE DIGGER #1
Who is he?

GRAVE DIGGER #2
His business partner. The meanest cur on two legs, so they say.

Dickens shrinks against the wall as the Lone Mourner passes him, shooting him a look of pure malice.

LONE MOURNER
Humbug.

Dickens recoils.

EXT./INT. DICKENS HOUSE - NIGHT

Dicken returns home, in a state of agitation, muttering to himself.

DICKENS
Old Scratch... all that money... shame...

He reaches for the doorknocker when suddenly the door flies open. Dickens reacts as the knocker comes away in his hand.

MRS. FISK
Good evening, sir.

DICKENS
Indeed, Mrs. Fisk.

He hands her his hat, and heads for the stairs, holds on to the knocker, not quite sure what to do with it, past the dining room where the whole family sits waiting for him.

KATE
Charles?

Dickens is oblivious.

DICKENS
Humbug!

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Dickens scribbles furiously, talking to himself, like a man possessed.
DICiks (v.o.)
It’s about a businessman. Or a
factory owner. A miser. His partner
dies. But he doesn’t shed a tear.
Thinks only of the money. And on
Christmas Eve—

Int. Chapman and Hall. Inner Office - Morning

Dickens paces, flushed with excitement, referring to his
hastily scrawled notes.

DICKENS
—on Christmas Eve— he meets some
kind of, of, of, I don’t know—

He gestures with his hands.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
—supernatural guides— or, spirits
possibly— who in the course of one
night, teach him what a miserable,
loathsome, selfish toad he is. A
short book. Short and sharp. A
hammerblow to the heart of this
smug, self-satisfied age.

Forster and the publishers nod their heads with enthusiasm,
though it is clear they don’t follow.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
It’s a comedy.

Forster breathes out, with relief.

FORSTER
Ah-ha!

Hall
Brilliant.

CHAPMAN
Does it have a title?

DICKENS
Yes. It’s called, A Christmas Ghost
Story... No, uh— A Christmas— Song.
Ballad. Something like that.

Chapman clears his throat, glances at Hall.

CHAPMAN
Intriguing. Really.... Er. One
Question— Why Christmas?
Dickens’s mouth twitches dangerously.

DICKENS
Why not?

Hall leaps into the fray.

HALL
Well, Christmas: Not what it Used to Be, what?

He chortles at his own joke.

CHAPMAN
I mean to say, Does Anyone Still Celebrate It? Other than our Clerk? Who Never misses an Opportunity to Take a Day off with Pay!

HALL
Indeed! Ha, ha. More or less an Excuse for Picking a Man's Pocket every Twenty-fifth of December!

Dickens stares at them. Hall shifts uncomfortably. An awkward silence.

CHAPMAN
What We Mean to Say, Mr. Dickens, is, Not Much Market for “Christmas Books”....What?

Dickens tries to control his rising temper.

Dickens
It is a Christmas book because Christmas is— or ought to be— the one time of the year when men and women open their shut-up hearts, and think of the people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures altogether.

Hall nods, vigorously.

HALL
Indeed.

CHAPMAN
Mr. Dickens. We are Already Halfway Through October.
(MORE)
Even if you Had already Written it, we couldn't Possibly Get it Illustrated, Typeset, Printed and Bound, Advertised and Distributed to Shops in only Six Weeks.

Dickens voice is calm, but his eyes blaze.

DICKENS
I see. Well, gentlemen. Thank you for your opinion.

And with that, he rips up the cheque Forster had given him and sweeps out of the room.

CHAPMAN
Mr. Dickens!

Dickens hastens down the street. Forster catches him by the sleeve.

DICKENS
—the scaly-headed vultures— money grubbing, scum-sucking—

FORSTER
Charles.

DICKENS
I'll do it myself.

FORSTER
WHAT?

DICKENS
I will pay for it, all of it, including the illustrations, and distribute myself.

FORSTER
Charles. This is madness. Think of your finances! Let’s go back and renegotiate. No shame in it. It’s just business. Why throw everything over for a-a- minor holiday?

Dickens regards him coldly.

DICKENS
My mind is made up, John. I’ve never felt so strongly about anything in my life. You can help me, or not. As you wish.
Dickens storms off, heading straight for a nearby Tailors Shop.

FORSTER
Where are you off to?

DICKENS
To raise some capital.

FORSTER
Eh?

DICKENS
(off his look)
One thing I’ve learned from my father: people will believe anything if you’re properly dressed.

OMIT

EXT. RAILWAY STATION - DAY

Through the steam from the engines, a NATTILY-DRESSED MAN helps his WIFE down from the train. We can’t quite make out his features at first. Then he turns and we see that it is MR. DICKENS SR., older than before but still as ebullient.

MR. DICKENS
Nothing like the air of the metropolis to put colour in your cheeks, eh mother?

Mrs. Dickens inhales deeply.

INT. HADDOCK’S OFFICE - DAY

Forster and Dickens, in his new clothes, perch on uncomfortable chairs in the office of his solicitor. Dickens’s eyes dart around the room: at the PAPERS stained with coffee, GLASSES WITH MOLD halfway up the side. A SAFE, wound round and about with heavy chains.

The door flies open and THOMAS HADDOCK, appears, in a faded coat over a threadbare waistcoat.

HADDOCK
Mr. Dickens. Mr. Forster. How do you?

DICKENS
Very well, thank you, Mr. Haddock.

HADDOCK
Mittens. Bad boy.
He picks an evil-looking cat off his chair and sits down.

HADDOCK (CONT'D)
Now. How can I be of service?

DICKENS
Well, sir, it’s about the loan--

MR. HADDOCK
- come to think of it, there was something I wanted to tell you. What was it?

Haddock gets up and starts to rifle through some DOG-EARED FILES on the desk.

HADDOCK
It was rather good news, as I recall--

Haddock finds a plate of biscuits under one of the files them and offers them to Forster.

FORSTER
Thank you. Ow!

The cat has leapt onto his lap.

HADDOCK
Mittens! You rascal... What was I--

DICKENS
You said you had good news. About the lawsuit?

HADDOCK
Lawsuit?

DICKENS
Copyright infringement.

HADDOCK
Eh?

FORSTER
Oliver Twisted. “As Re-originated from the Original.”

Haddock has found the file.

HADDOCK
Oh, yes! Here it is. Good news indeed. We won.
DICKENS
What?

HADDOCK
The fine was set at twenty-two hundred pounds.

Dickens nearly cries with relief.

DICKENS
Twenty-two hundred— Oh, Haddock. You can’t think how relieved I am. The pirates are beaten—

HADDOCK
The bad news is the defendants have no money.

Beat.

DICKENS
What?

HADDOCK
Bankrupt... Disappointing, I know... Of course, we could have them arrested. Throw them in the debtor’s prison.

Dickens shakes his head, repulsed.

DICKENS
No. No. No.

HADDOCK
As you wish. Meanwhile, if you would be so good.

Haddock unlocks a METAL CASE wrapped round with CHAINS and takes out a paper, stamped “Payment on Demand”.

HADDOCK (CONT’D)
Here’s my bill. No rush. Next week will be fine.

Haddock dips his biscuit in his tea, placidly. Dickens attempts to stifle his anxiety.

DICKENS
The thing is, Haddock...

He glances at Forster.
DICKENS (CONT’D)
I’m waiting for a big royalty cheque from America. A trifling sum— what was it, 400 pounds, Forster?

Forster nearly chokes on his biscuit.

FORSTER
Mm? Something like that.

The solicitor listens attentively.

DICKENS
Tell you what... why don’t we defer this bill until, say January. And, while we’re at it, perhaps you might add a little more to it. I’ll make it worth your while.

HADDOCK
More? You mean, borrow more?

DICKENS
Not much— perhaps 300 pounds? Until— until, January.

Forster reaches for the tea. The solicitor thinks. Dickens looks pale, wipes his brow.

HADDOCK
I’m sure we can work something out. At, say, twenty-five percent?

Forster can’t contain himself.

FORSTER
God’s teeth!

The cat leaps off Forster’s lap with a piteous MEOW. Dickens is not well. Ashen.

HADDOCK
However, I will require the money to be repaid at the end of January without fail.

DICKENS
Of course. Forster here will sort out the details with you.

Dickens walks carefully from the room, as if he might faint.
EXT. HADDOCK’S OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

Dickens hastens down the street, and turns the corner. He leans up against the wall, eyes closed, sweating.

FORSTER (O.S.)
Charles?

Dickens opens his eyes to find FORSTER looking at him closely. He claps him on the shoulder.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
Charles? Are you all right?

Dickens straightens up, shrugging off the moment.

DICKENS
A kidney spasm. That’s all.

He stalks off.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
(over his shoulder)
Find me an illustrator.

INT. PAWNSHOP – DAY

Mr. Dickens Senior is showing a PAWBROKER a book as his wife looks on.

MR. DICKENS
Best quality, sir. A1 condition.... and look –

He opens the cover.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)
Inscribed by the author.

The pawnbroker peers at the handwritten inscription.

PAWBROKER
To Papa. Love, Charles.

The pawnbroker examines Dickens Senior skeptically.

PAWBROKER (CONT’D)
Five bob.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hallo old girl. Hallo old girl.

Mr. Dickens looks up to see a CAGED CROW, walking up and down on his perch. Mr. Dickens’s face lights up. He turns back to the pawnbroker.
MR. DICKENS
Perhaps we might strike a bargain?

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Outside the study, a trio of servants and Tara are giggling as they listen to the master making strange noises.

DICKENS
Oh but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, old— ...
Scratch? Scrounger?...

INT. STUDY - DAY

DICKENS
- a covetous old sinner! ... old — whatshisname!

He throws his pen down in frustration.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

DICKENS (O.S.)
....Screwpull.... Scrabbly...
scr-rrrr-aahhh- chh...aahhh

They push Tara forward.

SERVANT
Go on. He won’t bite.

Tara knocks softly on the door, and opens it.

INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Tara enters. Dickens is nowhere to be seen. She tiptoes over to the fire. Suddenly, she hears—

DICKENS (O.S.)
Mr.... Scrimple!

She squeals with terror. Dickens sits up from the couch where he has been lying and takes the handkerchief off his face.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
You, what are you doing in here?

TARA
I’ve just come to see to the fire, sir.

DICKENS
I’m not to be interrupted under any circumstances. Do you hear?
TARA
I beg your pardon, sir. It won’t happen again.

Tara turns to go.

DICKENS
Wait. What’s that in your pocket?

Tara’s takes out a Penny Dreadful magazine and reluctantly hands it over to Dickens. Dickens examines the cover: a winged vampire with bloody teeth.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
“Varney the Vampire: The Feast of Blood.” Any good?

TARA
Oh, yes, sir. Thrilling.

He smiles.

DICKENS
Where did you learn to read?

TARA
My mum taught me. But then she died. So, I had to go to the Grubber.

Dickens recoils.

DICKENS
The Workhouse?

TARA
You won’t tell Mrs. Fisk, will you? She’d think I was shirking.

DICKENS
It will be our secret.

Dickens plucks a book off the shelf: The Arabian Nights.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
In fact, I’ll make you a trade. Varney the Vampire for... Aladdin and his Magic Lamp.

She takes the book in her hands with awe.

TARA
Oh. My.
DICKENS
Read it and tell me what you think.

TARA
Thank you, sir.

She hesitates.

TARA (CONT’D)
Who is Scrimple?

DICKENS
Scrimple?

TARA
When I came in... You was saying—

DICKENS
It’s just a name. In a story I’m concocting. You get the name right and then—if you’re lucky—the character will appear.

Tara eyes dart around the room.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
He’s not here yet.

He smiles. Then is struck by a thought. He starts to pace, oblivious to her.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Scrantish?

Tara tiptoes out, unobserved.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
S—c—rarmer—... S—c—r—ungge. No! Come on, come on, you old sinner.

He closes his eyes, conjuring up the image of the Lone Mourner in his mind.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
SCROOGE!

A sudden gust of wind makes the fire leap up, the papers fly around the room.

SCROOGE (O.S.)
Shut the window! Do you think I am made of money?

Dickens jumps. Behind him, SCROOGE, dressed as the Lone Mourner. Dickens is awe-struck.
DICKENS
Mr. Scrooge. How delightful to meet you, sir.

SCROOGE
I’m sorry I can’t say the same.

DICKENS
Come now, Mr. Scrooge. Don’t be standoffish. We ought to be friends.

SCROOGE
Don’t have friends. Don’t need ‘em.

Dickens laughs.

DICKENS
Naturally.... I know. Let’s play a game.

SCROOGE
I don’t like games.

DICKENS
Humour me... What do you think of when I say the word “Darkness”.

SCROOGE
Cheap.

DICKENS
Love.

SCROOGE
A Swindle.

DICKENS
Money.

SCROOGE
Security.

DICKENS
Children.

SCROOGE
Nuisances.

DICKENS
Workhouse.

SCROOGE
Useful.
A strange look passes over Scrooge’s face.

SCROOGE
Christmas.

DICKENS
That’s right.

Dickens leans in, pen at the ready. They both jump at the sound of a piercing SCREAM.

MRS. FISK (O.S.)
Help! Help! Get it away!

Dickens throws open the door.

INT. FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS

Dickens thunders down the stairs.

DICKENS
What is going on?

He sees Miss Fisk cowering in a corner, as a large RAVEN makes a dive at her head.

MRS. FISK
Get it away! The filthy thing!

The children laugh and clap their hands as Mr. Dickens waves a cage at the bird.

MR. DICKENS
Come on now, Grip. Back in your cage, old chap.

DICKENS
Father?

MR. DICKENS
Charles! Good day!

DICKENS
What are you doing here?

MR. DICKENS
I was in the neighbourhood. Thought I’d drop by with a present for the children.

CHARLEY
His name is Grip! He talks!
Grip is on a ledge, marching back and forth in agitation.

CHILDREN
Can we keep him?

GRIP
Halloa, old girl. Halloa old girl.

Mrs. Fisk clutches the edge of the bannister.

MRS. FISK
It’s bad luck. A bird in the house.
It means death.

Dickens motions for his father to move into the parlour.

INT. PARLOUR - CONTINUOUS

Dickens turns to address his father.

DICKENS
What are you doing back in London?

MR. DICKENS
My dear Charles. I will not
disguise from you, that this is not
the ardor with which a loving
father might be expected—

DICKENS
You are supposed to be in Devon.

MR. DICKENS
Ha, banishment! Be merciful, say
'death,'
For exile hath more terror in his
look—'

DICKENS
We had an agreement. I bought you a
house. Gave you an allowance.

Mr. Dickens looks sheepish.

MR. DICKENS
And you know how very grateful I
am. As for me, I’m happy wherever
the weather. But your Mother— is of
a more delicate sensibility. The
sight of cows causes her actual
physical pain.

DICKENS
Father—
MR. DICKENS
And then you see, I need to do some research in the London Library.

Dickens is skeptical of this.

DICKENS
Research?

MR. DICKENS
I have a commission from the Spectator. To write a feature on the Bank Charter Act. The editor was greatly impressed by my series on Marine Insurance.

Kate and Mrs. Dickens appear in the doorway.

KATE
Good for you, Father. And I hope you and Mother will stay here with us.

She shoots a look at Dickens.

KATE (CONT’D)
The children and I will enjoy having some company in the evening.

Mr. Dickens glances at his son, apprehensively.

DICKENS
(relenting)
The Spectator. Most impressive.

MR. DICKENS
Thank you my boy...
(dropping his voice)
Er. You couldn’t perhaps lend me a tenner? The fellow took my last farthing for the cage.

Suddenly there is an ominous CRASH in the hallway. They run to see Grip, perched on the new chandelier, causing bits and pieces to fall to the floor.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)
I’ll see that’s all cleaned up.

The children surround Mr. Dickens, delighted, as Dickens holds his tongue and heads back upstairs.

INT. STUDY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dickens paces, gripping his hair in frustration.
DICKENS
Gah! “This is not the ardor, with which a loving father—”

He throws himself down on the couch. He looks up and sees Scrooge.

SCROOGE
Humbug.

DICKENS
What is?

SCROOGE
Christmas.

Dickens sits up.

DICKENS
What about it?

SCROOGE
What is it but an excuse for picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December?...

Dickens jumps up and runs to his desk and rapidly goes through his pre-writing ritual.

DICKENS
Yes, yes! Keep going.

SCROOGE
...a time for paying bills without money....

Dickens starts to write, furiously.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)
...a time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer.

DICKENS
Excellent.

SCROOGE
If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with “Merry Christmas” on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should.

Dickens laughs out loud. He looks at Scrooge, admiringly.
DICKENS

Oh, Mr. Scrooge. You and I are going to do great things together.

Dickens starts scratching away, while Scrooge peers over his shoulder, smiling.

DICKENS (CONT’D)

Oh, but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge. A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained and solitary as an oyster.

Dickens glances over his shoulder. Scrooge immediately rearranges his features into a scowl.

There is a KNOCK at the door.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)

Charles?

Scrooge disappears. Mr. Dickens pokes his head in, smiling.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)

Hard at work?

Dickens grits his teeth.

DICKENS

What can I help you with, Father?

MR. DICKENS

I wondered if we might have an extra candlestick for our room?

DICKENS

Of course.

He hands him a candlestick. Mr. Dickens eyes a box on the mantelpiece.

MR. DICKENS

Oooo. Are those cigars?

Mr. Dickens advances into the room.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)

I must confess, I have acquired an irrepressible habit of smoking whilst I write. Shameful, I know.
He pockets the box.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)
Well. I won’t detain you.

He tiptoes out. Dickens picks up the doorknocker from the front door, now sat on his desk, and raps on it a few times, angrily. Scrooge immediately reappears, a look of alarm on his face.

SCROOGE
Don’t do that.

DICKENS
Why?

SCROOGE
He’ll think he’s being summoned--

Suddenly, the air is filled with a terrible clanking sound, as of chains being dragged up the stairs and the hallway. Scrooge looks terrified.

SCROOGE (CONT’D)
Too late.

DICKENS
Who is it?

Scrooge is too terrified to speak. Dickens picks up his book of names, rapidly flipping through the list.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Uh...Bunsby. Clennam. Heep...Hexam.

SCROOGE
Stop.

DICKENS
Magwitch?... Marley...

The lights in the room dim one by one. Suddenly, the door flies open and the ghost of JACOB MARLEY (bearing a strong resemblance to his solicitor, Haddock), covered in chains, padlocks, cash-boxes and steel purses, appears. Scrooge attempts a smile.

SCROOGE
Jacob? Is that you?

Dickens looks at Scrooge.

DICKENS
You know him?
SCROOGE
My business partner. Last I saw him, he was dead as a doornail.

The ghost gives out a dreadful howl.

MARLEY
Business! Mankind was my business! The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. But I did none of these.

SCROOGE
He was never one for a straight answer.

The ghost gives another howl.

DICKENS
Come in, I pray you.

Marley clanks into the room, dragging his chains.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
You are in chains. Tell me why.

MARLEY
I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard. I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it.

DICKENS
Indeed.

MARLEY
Is its pattern strange to you?

Dickens starts to write.

DICKENS
.... strange to you....

MARLEY
Or would you know the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself?

Dickens looks up. Marley is staring straight at him. Dickens takes a careful step towards Marley.

DICKENS
You mean him, surely.
Marley leans towards him, confidentially. He walks around Dickens, circling him with a loose chain.

**MARLEY**

Chains man, all around you. Past... and present... and what is to come.

Dickens stares at him, his mind racing. And with that, Marley pulls the loose chain tight around Dickens.

**FLASHBACK:**

39 INT. DICKENS FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

The children crowd around the Christmas table. Mr. Dickens at the head, in a richly patterned waistcoat.

A cheer goes up as Mrs. Dickens, sets a large turkey down on the table. Mr. Dickens holds up his hands for silence. He intones.

**MR. DICKENS**

Hail to thee blithe turkey. Whose exquisite odours now perfume the circumambient air. So let this day be fragrant with the love we bear each other. And may God bless us everyone.

He winks at YOUNG CHARLES, who stares up at him with adoration.

**YOUNG CHARLES**

....every one.

Suddenly, the door flies open. A BAILIFF fills the door frame, accompanied by two burly Deputies.

**BAILIFF**

Mr. John Dickens?

**MR. DICKENS**

That is my name.

**BAILIFF**

Come with me.

**MR. DICKENS**

What is the meaning of this termagant breach of our Yuletide feast?

**BAILIFF**

Eh?
MR. DICKENS
What is the matter?

BAILIFF
The matter is a debt of some forty pounds and ten shillings. Fourteen months in arrears.

The bailiff holds out a set of handcuffs.

BAILIFF (CONT’D)
If you please.

The deputies enter the room, and start loading household goods onto a cart, furniture, silverware, books, anything they can get their hands on.

MR. DICKENS
Gentlemen! Please! This is all a misunderstanding. A circumstance of great moment to me is to be decided in the ensuing term —

Young Charles bursts into tears.

YOUNG CHARLES
Tell them to stop. Tell them to stop!

A handcuffed Mr. Dickens is helpless to comfort him. As he struggles to reach Charles, he knocks the magic lantern and it falls, shattering on the ground.

INT. DICKEN STUDY— MORNING

Dickens wakes with a start. He is lying on the couch. He looks around. The room is empty.

EXT. ST. JAMES PARK — DAY

Dickens marches along the foot path, with Forster struggling to keep up.

DICKENS
What about Leech? For the illustrations.

FORSTER
Leech? He’s so prickly. And by no means the cheapest—

DICKENS
I don’t want the cheapest—
FORSTER
-Charles. For God’s sake, slow
down. You move at railway speed.

Dickens slows down slightly.

DICKENS
I want the best.

FORSTER
It’s going well then?

DICKENS
What?

FORSTER
The book.

DICKENS
Brilliant. Best thing I’ve ever
done.

FORSTER
So you’re--

DICKENS
I have eleven pages.

FORSTER
- Eleven?

DICKENS
If it weren’t for the constant
interruptions - you know my
father’s staying with us?

FORSTER
Oh.

DICKENS
Indeed. He could not have come at a
worse time-

Forster is distracted by the sight of a pretty young woman
(CHARLOTTE WIGMORE, age 25) walking by with a CHAPERONE.

FORSTER
Oh!

Charlotte’s face lights up at the sight of Forster. Her
companion turns her around to walk the other way.

DICKENS
Who was that?
FORSTER
Charlotte.

DICKENS
Who?

FORSTER
My fiancee. I told you--

DICKENS
Fiancee?

FORSTER
She’s a canny lass, is she not?

DICKENS
Indeed, most amiable.

FORSTER
Amiable? Why man, she’s an angel, a sylph, a– I don’t know what.

Suddenly Forster bursts into tears. Dickens stares at him, perplexed.

DICKENS
Whatever is the matter?

FORSTER
Charlotte and I – have come to a parting of the ways.

DICKENS
I thought you said you were engaged–

FORSTER
Were. Her father had no intention for her to marry the son of a Gateshead butcher.

Dickens tries to think what to say.

DICKENS
Perhaps its for the best. The life matrimonial... it’s not for everyone, old stick.

Forster manfully masters his emotions.

FORSTER
No doubt. No doubt.

Forster blows his nose.
FORSTER (CONT’D)
So... Leech?

DICKENS
That’s the ticket.

INT. LEECH’S STUDIO - DAY

Dickens and Forster visit LEECH, an eccentric-looking man, with hair like a rooster. Forster studies the framed cartoons on the wall as Dickens describes his vision to Leech.

DICKENS
Four wood cuts and four etchings. The cover in red. Hand-coloured. The title in rustic writing. The end papers to be green and all three edges to be gilded.

LEECH
Gilded? That will cost you.

DICKENS
It must be exquisite. That’s why we came to you.

LEECH
You’ll have to sell every copy to make your money back.

DICKENS
That is my intention, Mr. Leech.

Leech purses his lips together.

LEECH
Have you brought the manuscript?

DICKENS
I’ll have something for you in a week.

LEECH
A week? That leaves only four weeks to do the illustrations and get it to the printers in time for Christmas.

DICKENS
Can you do it?

LEECH
Mr. Dickens. I am not a hired hand. I am an artist. What you are asking is impossible.
DICKENS
Impossible for an ordinary man, yes. But you are no ordinary man, Mr. Leech. You are a genius.

Leech draws himself up like a poker.

LEECH
Fifty pounds. Paid in advance. Plus more for the plates.

Dickens hesitates.

DICKENS
Done.

Forster passes his hand over his face as Dickens heads for the door.

FORSTER
Charles-

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

Forster confronts Dickens on the street outside Leech’s studio.

FORSTER
Look, Charles, I don’t mean to be the voice of doom but before we lay out money for illustrations, we should consider what happens if you don’t finish on time.

DICKENS
I will finish on time.

Forster doesn’t have the heart to pursue it.

FORSTER
Quite.

EXT. DICKENS HOUSE - DAY

Dickens arrives home. The door is open. A workman stands by it, perplexed by the missing door knocker.

INT. DICKENS HALLWAY - DAY

Dickens steps in. Mrs. Fisk takes his hat.

DICKENS
Thank you—

Signor Mazzini is fixing the chandelier.
SIGNOR MAZZINI
Mr. Dickens. I fix. See?

DICKENS
Yes. Grazie, Mr. Mazzini.

SIGNOR MAZZINI
Is no problem. No problem! Only twelve guineas extra!

There is a sound of LAUGHTER in the parlour above. Dickens turns to Mrs. Fisk.

DICKENS
I thought my father was off to the British library.

MRS. FISK
It’s your sister, sir. Come from Manchester with her little boy.

INT. PARLOUR - CONTINUOUS

Dickens’ sister FANNY (mid-thirties, pretty but faded) is on the floor, with her young son, HENRY JR, and all the Dickens children, playing with a toy theatre. Henry’s father, the REVEREND HENRY BURNETT looks on, beaming.

DICKENS
Fanny!

Fanny glances up.

FANNY
Charlie!

She jumps up to embrace her brother.

DICKENS
Henry. How are you?

Dickens shakes the Reverend Henry’s hand.

REVEREND HENRY
Very well, grace be to God.

Dickens smiles at his nephew on the floor.

DICKENS
Master Henry. I hardly recognize you. How old are you now?

Henry struggles to his feet, with the help of a crutch.
YOUNG HENRY
Nine, if you please sir.

He coughs, violently.

DICKENS
Nine. Is it possible?

Tara enters, a little shyly.

TARA
Excuse me, sir. The children’s tea is ready in the dining room.

REVEREND HENRY
Come on, then young ‘un.

The Reverend puts Young Henry on his shoulders, and follows Tara and the other children out the door and down the stairs.

Fanny watches them go.

FANNY
There goes my heart.

DICKENS
What did the doctor say?

FANNY
He says we have to wait and see.

DICKENS
Fanny. Won’t you let me help?

FANNY
We’ll manage.

DICKENS
At least until Henry gets a new position?

FANNY
Something will turn up. I’m sure of it.

DICKENS
You sound like father.

She smiles.

FANNY
How is the old reprobate?

Dickens adopts their father’s tone of voice.
DICKENS

“This morning I had twenty-five shillings in my hand and now..."

He holds out his hands.

DICKENS (CONT’D)

“Observe the vacancy.”

They laugh.

FANNY

He means no harm.

DICKENS

It’s not enough. He bobs along like a cork on the surface of life, no thought for the future--

Fanny puts her hand on his arm.

FANNY

Charlie. Let it go, can’t you?

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)

Abaft, you scurvy pirates!

Dickens and Fanny crack open the door. Mr. Dickens, has just arrived home, Young Henry at his side. The children are crowded around him, rummaging in his pockets for gifts as he shouts, uproariously.

MR DICKENS

Brail up your capstan-bar!
Sheepshank your mizzen! Full speed ahead!

She smiles.

KATE

For all his faults, you won’t find a kinder man.

Dickens sighs.

DICKENS

How long he is growing up to be one.

INT. DICKENS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dickens wakes up with a start. Scrooge is standing over him, with a candle.
DICKENS
(whispers)
Why are you here?

SCROOGE
You’d better come and see who’s turned up.

Beside him, in bed, Kate stirs.

KATE
Charles?

Dickens puts his finger to his lips.

DICKENS
Just a touch of indigestion... Go back to sleep.

Dickens and Scrooge creep out.
Dickens and Scrooge stare at a ghostly figure (looking a good deal like Tara), dressed in white, wearing a wreath on her head. She stands by the window where the muslin curtains float eerily around her in the wind.

SCROOGE
Tell him who you are.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST
I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

The Ghost gestures towards the window.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST (CONT'D)
Follow.

SCROOGE
It’s awfully late and I’m not quite dressed.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST
Follow.

Scrooge draws back.

SCROOGE
Not bloody likely.

DICKENS
Why?

SCROOGE
Mucking around in the past? What’s the point?

DICKENS
You might learn something.

SCROOGE
I already know everything I need to know.

(to the Ghost)
Take him, why don’t you?

DICKENS
Me?

SCROOGE
If you’re so keen.

The ghost turns her gaze to Dickens.
DICKENS
It’s not about me.

SCROOGE
You’re the author aren’t you?

Dickens looks at the ghost, fearful. He doesn’t move. The
Ghost turns to look at the slightly ajar window, which now
SLAMS wide open.

EXT. WARREN’S BLACKING FACTORY - NIGHT

Young Charles holds his father’s hand tightly, through the
bars of a bailiff’s van, trying to keep from crying. The rest
of the family are huddled together behind his father in the
van.

MR. DICKENS
Don’t cry, Charlie. We’ll be back
for you before you know it.

YOUNG CHARLES
But why can’t I stay with you?

MR. DICKENS
You’re a big boy now, Charlie. You
need to help out. You’ll see.
(MORE)
It will be an adventure. You'll hardly think of us at all.

Behind him, the bailiff climbs on board the van.

BAILIFF
Time to go.

Young Charles starts to cry.

MR. DICKENS
Now, sir, enough of that. Stand up tall. Blood of iron, heart of ice.

The van starts to move off. Young Charles lets go of his father’s hands.

MR. DICKENS (CONT'D)
(shouting back)
Remember: you are the son of John Dickens. A Gentleman. You be sure and tell them that!

The van disappears around the corner. The boy turns and looks with dread at the old, tumbledown building, beneath the sign WARRENS BLACKING: “The Pride of Mankind”. A door opens spilling some light.

YOUNG CHARLES
(trying to gather strength)
Blood of iron, heart of ice.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING (PRESENT)

Dickens is in bed, tossing in his sleep. Kate comes in, dressed for the day. Dickens awakes with a start.

KATE
Good morning.

She bustles about the room.

DICKENS
What? Oh. Yes.

KATE
You were tossing and turning all night, you know.

DICKENS
Bad dreams.

KATE
What about?
He shakes his head.

DICKENS
I don’t know. Shadows. Nothing more.

KATE
A little daylight will cure you.

She throws open the curtains.

INT/EXT. MARKET - DAY

A theatre curtain is pulled aside to reveal a puppet show, performing to a watching crowd in the COVERED market. All is bustle and colour.

Dickens wanders amongst the stalls overflowing with brightly coloured goods, tin pans, second-hand clothes, baskets of chestnuts, pears and apples, piles of filberts.

Suddenly, a figure is there, tugging on his sleeve. It’s Scrooge.

SCROOGE
I trust we’ll have no more of that.

Dickens is taken aback.

DICKENS
Of --?

SCROOGE
The past. A lot of nonsense. Onward.

Scrooge flinches as a couple of CHILDREN run screaming by them.

DICKENS
Were you never a child, Mr. Scrooge?

SCROOGE
I don’t recall. Come on, we’re wasting time. We should be working.

DICKENS
I am working.

SCROOGE
Here?

DICKENS
I’m gathering inspiration.
SCROOGE
Gathering... what??

Dickens gestures.

DICKENS
What do you see? When you look around?

SCROOGE
A market.

DICKENS
What else?

He points to various people in the market: A PIEMAN with his arms laden with pie cans, yelling:

PIEMAN
Pies all’ot! Bel, beef, or mutton pies! Penny Pies, all’ ot!

SCROOGE
Buyers and sellers.

DICKENS
What else?

A Cockney SCAM ARTIST, doing a patter.

SCAM ARTIST
....Three thimbles and one little pea- with a one, two, three, and a two, three, one, catch him who can, look on, keep your eyes open and niver say die!

SCROOGE
Thieves and ruffians.

As they step out from the “souk” into the open air street market, He points to A YOUNG COUPLE, lost in admiration of each other. A NEWSAGENT, calling out:

NEWSAGENT
Times, gen’l’mn, Times! Highly Interesting murder, gen’l’mn,

A FIDDLER, plays a tune and a BUTCHER calls out.

BUTCHER
Clear away! Clear away, lads!
He tosses the fiddler a coin, catches up his WIFE and starts to dance. Dickens laughs with pleasure, then looks at Scrooge, who shrugs.

DICKENS
Life, Mr. Scrooge! London! The great theatre of the world! It’s all here!

SCROOGE
Humbug.

DICKENS
You say that a lot.

SCROOGE
I’m a man of facts and calculations. Realities, not fancy... Not-- not-- what the devil is that?--

Dickens and Scrooge stare at a strange sight: a PAPIER MACHE BOTTLE is toddling along the street. When the bottle reaches Dickens, a hand pops out of it, and thrusts a flyer in his hand: an advertisement for Warren’s Blacking.

Dickens is frozen for a moment, unnerved. He takes off in the other direction.

DICKENS
Must go.

SCROOGE
Where to?

DICKENS
(over his shoulder)
Back to work.

The family are at the dinner table waiting to eat. Mr. Dickens entertains the children, making them giggle.

MR. DICKENS
Papa... potatoes... poultry... and prunes... are all very good words for the lips.

At the other end of the table, Mrs. Dickens reminisces for Kate’s benefit.
MRS. DICKENS
And oh, the parties.... We used to keep such hours! Balls, dinners–champagne–

Mr. Dickens ties his napkin around his head, winks at the children. The children giggle.
KATE
Well, it looks as if Charles won’t be joining us this evening. Again. We may as well begin.

Mr. Dickens has already begun.

MR. DICKENS
First rate capon, Mrs. Fisk.

MRS. FISK
Thank you sir. I’ll let the cook know.

MRS. DICKENS
...and the chairs had turned legs with green chintz squabs to match the curtains.

At that moment, Dickens appears in the doorway.

DICKENS
What story is that, Mother?

Mrs. Dickens reddens.

MRS. DICKENS
I was only telling Kate about the dining room set we used to have. Rosewood. In the most approved taste.

DICKENS
You mean, the one we pawned?

An awkward silence.

MRS. DICKENS
Charles. You are a satirical monster.

Kate is bewildered.

KATE
Is that a joke, dear?

DICKENS
Not a very amusing one.

Mrs. Dickens examines her hands, mortified. An awkward silence. Dickens turns a cold eye on his father.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Is that a new waistcoat father?
MR. DICKENS
It is a little more expensive, but
I've always said, people will
believe anything if you're properly
dressed.

Beat.

DICKENS
Kate. Will you ask Tara to bring up
a tray with something on it?

KATE
I’ll bring it up.

DICKENS
No! I need Tara to do it.

MR. DICKENS
That’s the spirit my boy.
Procrastination is the thief of
time, eh Charles. Collar him!

Dickens looks at him, but decides not to say anything.

MRS. FISK
I’ll get her sir. Tara!

Mr. Dickens, unperturbed, digs into his food.

MR. DICKENS
We must never disturb the poet when
the divine frenzy is upon him. I
myself have suffered the same
delirium. Often to the detriment of
my health, as you know, my love.

INT. DICKENS STUDY - NIGHT

Dickens is talking to himself in the mirror, like a mad man.

DICKENS
Know the place! Was I apprenticed
here? Why it’s old Fezziwig!

Behind him, in the room, the FEZZIWIGS appear (the genial
BUTCHER and his WIFE from the market). They start to dance.

FEZZIWIG
Clear away, lads! Clear away! It’s
Friday night!

There is a knock on the door. The Fezziwigs freeze.
DICKENS
Who is it?

TARA (O.S.)
It’s Tara, sir. With your dinner.

Dickens throws open the door.

DICKENS
Tara. Come in. Come in.

He takes the tray from her.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Sit. I want to read you something.

TARA
Oh, I don’t think Mrs. Fisk—

DICKENS
Skittleshins to Mrs. Fisk. Sit. Please.

She does.

54 INT. SITTING ROOM – NIGHT
Kate sits alone and bored. Another evening without the company of her husband. She looks at the ceiling. The study above her.

55 OMIT

56 INT. STUDY – NIGHT
Dickens is reading to Tara from the manuscript. She smiles lost in her imagination.

DICKENS
... in easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly giant, who bore a glowing torch and held it up to shed its light on Scrooge as he came peeping round the corner.

TARA
The second ghost!

The lights in the room slowly brighten, revealing the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT (bearing a strong resemblance to Forster in a beard), seated high up on a throne, amidst a cornucopia of apples and oranges and pears, chestnuts, mistletoe and holly. Around him in a circle, various other CHARACTERS from the book, stare up in rapt attention.
The Ghost laughs as he sees Scrooge approach, shielding his eyes from the bright light.

SCROOGE
Who are you?

The ghost laughs.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
I am the Ghost of Christmas present. Come closer man and know me better.

Scrooge fearfully climbs the library steps.

SCROOGE
Excuse me, but -- why all this-produce?

The Ghost laughs again.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
These are the gifts of abundance, of good will and generosity.

SCROOGE
Eh?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Of course you wouldn’t understand much about that, would you? Unlike these good people.

The Ghost of Christmas Present points towards the hearth, where the CRATCHIT FAMILY including BOB (looking a good deal like Henry Burnett Sr.), and TINY TIM (a paler, more fragile version of Henry) are seated round a table, staring joyfully at a very modest Christmas dinner of mashed potatoes, apple sauce, gravy, and a very small roasted goose.

CRATCHIT
My dear Mrs. Cratchit. You have outdone yourself this year.

Mrs. Cratchit beams, and looks around at her children.

MRS. CRATCHIT
Everyone pitched in. Even Tim.

Tim points to the mismatched cups and plates.

TINY TIM
I set the table!

Cratchit lifts his glass.
CRATCHIT
A Merry Christmas to us all, my
dears. And may God bless us.

TINY TIM
God bless us every one!

Tiny Tim’s little body is racked with coughs. Cratchit picks
him up in his arms.

Scrooge stares at Tiny Tim, moved.

SCROOGE
I didn’t know Cratchit had a
crippled son.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Didn’t you ever think to ask?

SCROOGE
He’s my clerk. I don’t pay him to
tell me about his personal life.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
You hardly pay him at all.

SCROOGE
Fifteen shillings a week.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
For a man with a family? Not too
mention a sick child.

SCROOGE
That is the market rate.

The ghost bristles.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Do you really believe that every
inch of existence is a bargain
across the counter?

SCROOGE
I-- I--

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Observe this family. They don’t
have much, and yet they’re happy,
grateful and contented with the
time. Whereas you are miserable and
content with nothing.
SCROOGE

I never heard such folly.

A clock in the room strikes the hour.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Heed well what I have said.
Farewell.

SCROOGE

No. Wait-

DICKENS (O.S.)

Intermission.

The characters spontaneously applaud as Scrooge and the Ghost take a bow.

MRS. FEZZIWIG

Thrilling performance.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

That’s very kind.

MR. FEZZIWIG

Where did you train?

A clock in the room strikes the hour. The lights start returning to normal. The characters disappear.

Dickens turns over the last page of the manuscript.

DICKENS

And that’s as far as I’ve got.

Tara stirs herself, like one waking from a sleep.

DICKENS (CONT’D)

Tara?
She nods, still half in a dream, then turns back.

    TARA
    How do you do that, sir?

    DICKENS
    What, Tara?

    TARA
    Make a world, come alive.... I could almost see and hear them people.

She drifts out the door.

    TARA (CONT’D)
    Especially that Tiny Tim. The poor mite

Dickens pleased his writing has affected someone so much, turns to see Scrooge, jolting him out of his reverie.

    SCROOGE
    A word in your ear.

Dickens is wary.

    DICKENS
    About?

    SCROOGE
    The scene. It’s very one-sided-

    DICKENS
    One-sided?

    SCROOGE
    My character doesn’t get to explain his side of things. I’ve taken the liberty of writing a speech -

    DICKENS
    No.

    SCROOGE
    -- something about the rational self-interest and the natural tendency of free markets--

    DICKENS
    No. No. And no.
Scrooge scowls.

    SCROOGE
    What kind of book is this, anyway?

Dickens sweeps out of the room.

Leech goes to a cabinet and counts out fifty pounds in cash.

    DICKENS (CONT’D)
    What’s this?

    LEECH
    I am returning your money.

    FORSTER
    —My dear Mr. Leech—

    LEECH
    Find another artist.

    DICKENS
    We don’t want another artist.

    LEECH
    A jolly Christmas ghost? What does that mean? I can’t draw what I don’t understand!
DICKENS
Well, he’s – he’s everything that’s best about Christmas. He’s the soul of kindness and generosity, he’s-

He glances at Forster.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Forster.

FORSTER
Eh?

CUT TO:

INT. LEECH’S STUDIO – LATER

Forster, dressed in a sheet, open to his navel, and holding a lamp aloft, poses uncomfortably while Dickens applies makeup to his cheeks.

Leech waits to sketch him.

EXT. LONDON/HATCHARD’S – NIGHT

Dickens is stopped outside of Hatchard’s. In the store window a sign advertises “A New Christmas Book by Mr. Dickens. Order Now and Avoid Disappointment.” Dickens peers through the window lost in thought.

Suddenly, a POSSE of Characters from the book appears behind him, Scrooge amongst them, staring in at the window.

SCROOGE
(to Cratchit)
In stores by Christmas? That will be a miracle.

The posse sniggers.

DICKENS
Go away.

SCROOGE
Three flops in a row. Up to your eyeballs in debt. I’d think you’d be glad of some advice.

The POSSE nods in agreement.

DICKENS
All right. I’ve had a few flops, what of it? I’m still young. It’s not as if I--
Suddenly the surrounding area falls into darkness as the gas lamps dim one by one. Scrooge turns pale as shadows take over the street. Dickens turns to see the POSSE and SCROOGE staring at a dark STATUE across the road.

Slowly the statue comes to life, its robes float eerily in the wind, giving form to a terrifying Phantom, its face obscured by a hood. (The GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET-TO-COME). Dickens and Scrooge exchange fearful looks.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Are we in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?

The Spirit nods.

SCROOGE
(to Dickens)
Why doesn’t he speak?

DICKENS
Shhh.
(to Ghost)
You are here to show us the shadows of the things that have not happened but will happen, is that so?

The Spirit slowly raises a shrouded arm and points down the street, the giant shadow of its finger comes to a stop at a small door.

SCROOGE
(whispering to Dickens)
Where does it want us to go?

DICKENS
I think I know.

With that he heads towards the door, SCROOGE and the POSSE following.

SCROOGE
I have a bad feeling about this.

DICKENS (O.S.)
They entered poor Bob Cratchit’s house and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Mrs. Cratchit and the children, dressed in black, huddle together by the fire. Tiny Tim is not among them. We see his lonely crutch leaning against the fireplace.
DICKEYNS (V.O.)
Then Bob came in the door.

MRS. CRATCHIT
You went today, then Robert? To the cemetery?

Crachit struggles to be cheerful as he enters the room.

CRATCHIT
Yes, my dear. I wish you could have gone to see how green a place it is. But you’ll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday.

He smiles through his tears.

CRATCHIT (CONT’D)
My little child. My little, little child!

His voice cracks and he covers his eyes.

TARA
Oh no!

The characters freeze. Scrooge shoots a look over his shoulder, TO REVEAL THE SCENE IS TAKING PLACE IN DICKENS STUDY

SCROOGE
Rude!

Tara has been listening to the story, her eyes wide with emotion.

TARA
Is Tiny Tim dead?

SCROOGE
Of course he is. Imbecile.

DICKEYNS
(gently)
He was very ill.

SCROOGE
You can’t save every child in London.

DICKEYNS
And the family has no money for a doctor.
Tara is becoming upset.

    TARA
    Then Scrooge must save him.

Scrooge is taken aback.

    SCROOGE
    Me?

Dickens looks from one to the other.

    DICKENS
    But he wouldn’t-

    TARA
    Why?

    DICKENS
    He’s too selfish.

    TARA
    He can change. There’s good in him somewhere, I know it.

Scrooge rolls his eyes.

    SCROOGE
    People don’t change.

    DICKENS
    He’s been this way for a long time.
    I’m not sure he can change.

    TARA
    Of course he can. He’s not a monster.

    DICKENS
    I don’t - he isn’t -

    SCROOGE
    Thought this was a ghost story. Not a fairy tale.

    TARA
    He wouldn’t let Tiny Tim die, Mr. Dickens. He has a heart, doesn’t he? It would be too wicked. Even for him.

Dickens stares at them a moment, now plagued with doubt.

FLASHBACK
Inside the noisy, squalid factory, Young Charles is led by a Foreman to a score of pale-faced, miserable-looking CHILDREN, all of them busy pasting labels on bottles or packing them in casks.

FOREMAN
Boys. This here is Charlie Dickens. And what was it you was just telling me, lad? About your Dad?

Young Charles draws himself up proudly.

YOUNG CHARLES
My father is a gentleman.

The boys jeer. Young Charles flushes with embarrassment.

One of the boys, POLL, calls out.

POLL
Where is he, then? Dining with the queen?

Another boy calls out.

BOY
I ‘eard he’s in the stone jug.

FOREMAN
Hush, you lot. Where’s your manners?

The Foreman addresses him with elaborate politeness.

FOREMAN (CONT’D)
Master Dickens. Perhaps you would be so good as to join us at work? If you’ve nothing better to do?

The Foreman thrusts him down hard onto the work bench. Young Charles looks around, miserable, at his surroundings.

FOREMAN (CONT’D)
No shirking here.

A rat scuttles nearby, to reveal a sheer drop to the giant blacking VATS below. Poll sits down beside him and hisses at him.
POLL
You’re no better than me, cocker.
You’d best learn that.
INT. DICKEN STUDY - NIGHT

Dickens sits at his desk. He looks at the clock. It’s the middle of the night. He once again goes through his ritual of straightening everything on his desk.

He tidies his manuscript, picks up his pen, dips it in ink, then stares at the paper.

There is a racket in the hallway outside the door.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)
'Tis now the very witching time of night,

MRS. DICKENS (O.S.)
Shhh, dear.

Mr. and Mrs. Dickens are in the hallway outside the door.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out—

Scrooge appears.

SCROOGE
Shakespeare. Now there’s a man who could write. I doubt he ever had a blockage.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)
Now could I drink hot blood!

Dickens grips his hair in frustration.

SCROOGE
(egging dickens on)
Self-preservation is the first law of nature. That’s just a fact.

Dickens throws open the door to find Mr. Dickens, drunkenly negotiating the stairs with the help of Mrs. Dickens.

MRS. DICKENS
That’s right dear. Just a few more steps.

MR. DICKENS
“Oh, heart lose not thy nature; let not ever the soul of Nero—

Mr. Dickens sees Charles and attempts to regain his posture.
MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)
Oh. Good evening, Charles.
Mrs. Dickens is a little afraid of her son.

MRS. DICKENS
We’ll get him straight into bed, Charles, dear. We were up the river to Kew and I think perhaps it was too long a day.

DICKENS
Kew! What about your newspaper article?

MR. DICKENS
Article?

DICKENS
The one you’re writing on the Bank Charter Act? It’s been over a month.

Mr. Dickens shifts, uncomfortably.

MR. DICKENS
Oh, that. As it happens, the editor was not able to— that is to say— due to pecuniary involvements of a complicated nature— he found it necessary to— to cancel the commission.

DICKENS
So. No newspaper article.

MR. DICKENS
However, I rejoice to say that I have every hope of something turning up—

Dickens sees Scrooge hovering behind him, scowling.

DICKENS
I think it’s time you went back to Devon, Father.

Beat.

MR. DICKENS
Indeed.

DICKENS
As soon as possible.

MR. DICKENS
Of course, dear boy. We shall catch the afternoon train tomorrow.
He stumbles and nearly falls, but is caught by Tara.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)
(with dignity)
Thank you, my dear. Here--

He fumbles in his pocket for a coin.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)
Let me give you something for your trouble.

TARA
That’s all right, sir.

MR. DICKENS
You’re very kind.

They move away.

MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)
(to Tara)
No-one is useless in this world who lightens the burden of another. Remember that, Tara.

TARA
I will, sir.

Mrs. Dickens gives Dickens a reproachful look.

MRS. DICKENS
Don’t be hard on him, Charlie. You don’t know what he’s been through.

DICKENS
Don’t I?

MRS. DICKENS
He feels it all, you know. He would never tell you, but he feels it all.

MR. DICKENS (O.S.)
Ride on! Ride on over all obstacles and win the race!

Dickens turns back to his study. Scrooge is smug.

SCROOGE
That’s it. Blood of iron, heart of ice. Now maybe we can finish this thing.
Off Dickens his face. Lost.

CUT TO:

62 OMIT 62
63 OMIT 63
64 OMIT 64
65 INT. STUDY - DAY 65

Dickens sits at his desk, staring straight ahead.

In the room, the characters (including Cratchit, Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig), lounge around, like actors on a break. Some knitting or doing the crossword. Dickens picks up a pen, and the characters look up hopefully.

DICKENS
All right, let’s run it again. From the scene with Scrooge’s debtors.
The characters groan. Scrooge, lying on the chaise, looks over with disdain.

    SCROOGE
    What’s the point?

    DICKENS
    The point?

    SCROOGE
    We keep stopping at the same place.

    DICKENS
    Because I’m working out the ending.

    SCROOGE
    Admit it. You’re blocked.

    DICKENS
    I’m not blocked.

    SCROOGE
    Now if you’d take my advice--

    DICKENS
    I am the author here.

    SCROOGE
    (mutters)
    Allegedly.

Beat.

    DICKENS
    I’m going out.

All the characters get to their feet.

    DICKENS (CONT’D)
    Alone!

The characters fall back, silent.

INT. GARRICK CLUB - DAY

Dickens finds Forster at a table, scribbling in a notebook.

    DICKENS
    Forster. I need your help.

Forster grabs his coat in alarm.

    FORSTER
    What is it? The children?
DICKENS
What? No. The children are fine.

Forster sits back down. Dickens glances at the notebook
Forster has been writing in.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Candle/scandal... flirt/hurt...
Charlotte/Poor heart. My God, is it
a poem? It’s atrocious. What’s got
into you?

Forster rushes to snatch the paper away.

FORSTER
You look terrible. Is something
wrong?

DICKENS
It’s the book. I’m having trouble
with one of the characters.

He looks out the window again where the entire CAST OF
CHARACTERS from the book are standing, looking up at him.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Several of them, actually.

FORSTER
What exactly is the problem?

Dickens picks away at Forster’s dinner.

DICKENS CONT’D)
The problem is, could a man as mean-
spirited, as evil as Scrooge— could
he become a different person
overnight?

FORSTER
What is so evil about him?

DICKENS
Well, he’s a miser.

FORSTER
That doesn’t make him evil. It just
makes him cheap.

DICKENS
No, but he worships money. It’s the
only thing that matters to him.

FORSTER
Why?
DICKENS
Because... he has nothing else.

FORSTER
No friends? No family?

DICKENS
No-one he trusts.

FORSTER
Why?

DICKENS
I suppose he’s afraid—

FORSTER
Of?

Dickens struggles to answer.

DICKENS
Of- being found out.

FORSTER
What?

THACKERAY (O.S.)
Hullo, chaps.

Thackeray appears at the table.

FORSTER
Thackeray.

THACKERAY
Charles! Haven’t seen anything of yours in print for ages. Don’t tell me you have a blockage!

DICKENS
Not in the least. I’m neck and heels into a Christmas book!

Thackeray is flummoxed.

THACKERAY
What the deuce is that?

DICKENS
A story about Christmas. For Christmas.

THACKERAY
A story about—? Ha ha! How amusing... Well.

(MORE)
THACKERAY (CONT'D)
Best of luck with it! Oh! Did you hear? My last book has come out in a Railway edition. Sold ten thousand copies. In one week! “There’s gold in them thar hills” as your American friends would say.

He wafts away. Dickens and Forster exchange looks.

FORSTER
Let’s go somewhere else and get a real drink.

EXT. THE GREEN HOG - NIGHT

Forster and Dickens stumble out of a bar, laughing. Forster sings, in a thick North Country accent—

FORSTER
“She's a big lass, she's a bonny lass, an she likes her beer An I call her Cushie Butterfield an I wish she was here.”

DICKENS
What language is that?

FORSTER
I am a Geordie! And we are Gods!

Dickens gapes around him in confusion.

DICKENS
Where are we?

FORSTER
Hungerford Stairs. Phew. Smell the river? What’s that?

Dickens recoils at the sight of the Warren’s Blacking Factory looming out of the swirling fog.

DICKENS
(bitterly)
A grave yard.

FORSTER
It’s the old Warren’s Factory. I wonder they haven’t torn it down yet.

DICKENS
Or burnt it. I might do it myself one night.
FORSTER
Why? What have you got against boot blacking?

Forster looks at a pale and sweaty Dickens.

FORSTER (CONT’D)
Charles? What is it?

Dickens looks at Forster, a strange expression on his face.

DICKENS
I -- I have this recurring nightmare.

FORSTER
Oh, nightmares. I have one where I’m being chased by a giant badger. What’s yours?

Beat.

DICKENS
Never mind.

FORSTER
Right. Time to go home.

DICKENS
I can’t.

FORSTER
Why?

Dickens is becoming emotional.

DICKENS
The book - I can’t -- The characters - won’t do what I want. ... I’m afraid.

FORSTER
Of what?

DICKENS
That if I don’t finish it, I’ll never write again.

FORSTER
Go home, marra. Get some sleep.

DICKENS
I don’t want to.
Don’t be daft. Your wife will be worried sick.

My wife— doesn’t understand me—

Forster puts his arm heavily on his friend’s shoulder.

I’ve got news for you, marra. None of us understand you! You’re a freak of nature. I’m exhausted spending two hours in your company. ...Go on home, now. It’s cold, the night. Go home. I’ll see you in the morning.

He leaves. Dickens stares at the building. He takes a few drunken steps towards it, then turns and flees.

Dickens goes to let himself in the front door. He glances down and sees someone rooting through the dust bin. Dickens rushes down to the vagrant who is going through his rubbish.

Here, you, what are you up to?

The man turns around.

Hello, Charlie.

His father.

Father? What are you doing here?

I - I had some business to attend to, so I thought I’d—

You just left town! What business could you possibly have—

Dickens notices the piece of paper in his hands and grabs it. It’s a letter with his own signature on it, crumpled and discarded.

What were you going to do with that?
His father looks sheepish.

**DICKENS (CONT’D)**

You were going to sell it, weren’t you?

**MR. DICKENS**

It’s no good to you, is it?

**DICKENS**

This is what you’ve been doing? Going through the rubbish like a tramp? Selling bits and pieces of me. Is that your business? Look at me. Aren’t you ashamed?

Mr. Dickens doesn’t respond.

**DICKENS (CONT’D)**

I bought you a house and furnished it myself. I give you an allowance. What more could you possibly need?

**MR. DICKENS**

Oh, reason not the need!

His voice rises.

**MR. DICKENS (CONT’D)**

You see me here, you gods, a poor old man—

**DICKENS**

No. Stop.

Mr. Dickens can’t look his son in the eye.

**MR. DICKENS**

You don’t know what it’s like, Charlie. To be poor. To be nothing.

Dickens fury is incandescent—

**DICKENS**

Not know? Not know? At eleven years old I was made to know it— Working twelve hours a day, going hungry, wandering the streets all alone and afraid—

Mr. Dickens attempts to respond, but is cut off by Dickens.
Because your father—who is supposed to care for you—is so utterly thriftless--

Mr. Dickens weeps.

**MR. DICKENS**

Dear boy. Don't—I beg you.

**DICKENS**

No. You are not the victim here. This is about me. And Fanny. It's about all of us. We've lived our whole lives in the shadow of your recklessness.

Dickens stares at his father, weeping in the street.

**DICKENS (CONT’D)**

Go away. I'm sickened at the sight of you. You are nothing but a drag and chain upon my life. I owe you nothing. Go.

Dickens goes in the house and shuts the door firmly behind him. Then leans against it, breathing heavily.

**INT. PARLOUR - NEXT DAY**

Forster, is listening while Dickens reads the manuscript aloud.

**DICKENS**

"...Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of the things that May be only?"

He looks up.

**DICKENS (CONT’D)**

And that's as far as I got.

Beat.

**FORSTER**

It's brilliant.

**DICKENS**

Are you pulling my leg?

**FORSTER**

No. I promise you.
DICKENS
Well... that’s... encouraging—

FORSTER
My only criticism—

Forster stops himself.

DICKENS
Yes?

FORSTER
—Tiny Tim—

Dickens stares at him.

DICKENS
What about him?

FORSTER
Are you really going to let him die?

DICKENS
Why? What’s the problem?

FORSTER
Well, it’s a Christmas book. Shouldn’t it be hopeful? Isn’t that what Christmas is about? The hope that, in the end, our better natures will prevail?

Beat.

DICKENS
You were the one who made me kill off Little Nell.

FORSTER
I stand by that decision.

DICKENS
My readers implored me—

FORSTER
But this is different. If Tiny Tim dies, then what’s the point?

DICKENS
This isn’t a fairy tale.
FORSTER
As mean as Scrooge is, he still has a heart. Doesn’t he deserve a second chance?

Beat.

DICKENS
Thank you, Forster—

FORSTER
You’re welcome—

DICKENS
—for reminding me why I never ask your opinion on my work.

FORSTER
You ask me for my opinion all the time.

DICKENS
Your services are no longer required.

FORSTER
You can’t sack me.

DICKENS
Why?

FORSTER
Because – I don’t work for you. I do what I do as a friend.

DICKENS
Good day, Mr. Forster.

Forster gets to his feet, heavily.

FORSTER
Right...
    (turning back)
See you Friday, will I?

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

The characters have taken over every inch of it. Cratchit and The Pieman, are drinking tea by the window. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig are playing cards. There’s an atmosphere of gloom.
A CHARWOMAN sits by the fire with her feet up on the hob. As Dickens enters the room she glances over at him with mild interest.

CHARWOMAN
Who’s that, then?

Scrooge, dozing on the sofa, opens an eye.
SCROOGE
Nobody. The author.

CHARWOMAN
No wonder he looks so depressed.

Dickens picks up the manuscript and flips through it.

DICKENS
All right. That’s enough. Let’s get back to work.

SCROOGE
(to Cratchit)
God bless us, everyone...

They titter together like children.

DICKENS
Why are you so miserable?

SCROOGE
What else can I be, when I live in such a world of fools as this.

DICKENS
Mean-spirited, cynical –

SCROOGE
Take a look in the mirror sometime.

DICKENS
Me?

SCROOGE
“Is that a new candle, Kate?” “Your services are no longer required.” “I’m sickened at the sight of you.” Hypocrite.

A knock at the door stops him from replying. Dickens throws it open, furious. Tara is there with a cup of cocoa.

TARA
Pardon me, sir. Mrs. Dickens sent me –

DICKENS
This is intolerable.

Dickens calls down the hall.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Mrs. Fisk?
Mrs. Fisk appears.

MRS. FISK
Yes, sir?

DICKENS
Take this child away from here and see that she doesn’t disturb me ever again. Do you hear me?

MRS. FISK
Yes, sir. Come on, girl.

Tara is mortified. Head down, she scurries down the stairs.

Back in the room, Scrooge raises his arms above his head in triumph.

SCROOGE
Yes! Banish her! Banish them all!

DICKENS
Be quiet--

SCROOGE
Humanity’s great benefactor? Humbug!

DICKENS
Shut it. Or I’ll make you bald. With bad teeth.

SCROOGE
Go ahead. It won’t change a thing. You still won’t have an ending.

Scrooge crosses his arms defiantly. He looks at the others: they follow suit.

DICKENS
This is ridiculous. You’re all being ridiculous.

They continue to stare him down.

In a sudden movement, Dickens picks up the glass inkwell and throws it at the fireplace, where it shatters.

The room instantly empties of characters.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Come on then. Coward. Fight me. Fight me. Come out. If you be a man. Come out and fight!
INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kate stares at the ceiling, as Dickens rails away in the study.

   DICKENS (O.S.)
   Come out. If you be a man. Come out and fight!

She is clearly disturbed.

INT. DICKENS STUDY - MORNING

Dickens wakes with a start and looks around. The room is a disaster. Papers everywhere. Ink staining the wall.

His glance falls on the Penny Dreadful that Tara left behind, with its lurid cover of Varney the Vampire. He stares at it a moment.

   DICKENS
   Tara!

He goes to the door and bellows down the stairs.

   DICKENS (CONT’D)
   Tara!

INT. DICKENS HOUSE. DINING ROOM - MORNING

The children are at breakfast with Kate. Mrs Fisk is there too. The mood is sombre. Dickens appears, his clothes awry, full of an edgy energy.

   DICKENS
   Whatever is the matter?

   CHARLEY
   Tara.

Charley bursts into tears.

   DICKENS
   What about her?

   CHARLEY
   She’s gone.

   DICKENS
   On whose authority?
KATE
You asked Mrs. Fisk to take her away.

DICKENS
(to Mrs Fisk)
Then go and search for her. Rehire her at once.

MRS. FISK
An Irish orphan in London? It would be like trying to find a needle in a haystack.
Dickens eyes blaze. He turns on Kate.

DICKENS
Why didn’t you stop her?

KATE
How was I to know you didn’t mean it? You said—

DICKENS
I say a lot of things that are nonsense. It’s what happens when I’m working.

KATE
Charles.

DICKENS
You knew, when you married me, what I was like: how ideas take possession of me.

KATE
I did. But you don’t know what it’s like to live with you, always walking on eggshells, trying to guess your mood, to know which of your commands is a whim and which is in earnest. Sometimes I think your characters matter more to you than your own flesh and blood.

DICKENS
I am who I am.

KATE
And who is that? It’s as if there are two of you, Charles. One that is good and kind, and a secret self, that no-one is allowed to know or question.

Dickens stares at her a moment, then storms out of the room.

73A INT. STUDY - DAY

Dickens, heads back into the study, distraught. He catches himself in the mirror. We hear sounds of squealing rats, quietly as first, but as they build up...
INT. WARREN’S BLACKING FACTORY – DAY

Young Charles is sitting at his bench, looking frail. His clothes are torn and dirty. His eyes are hollow. A ragged cough shakes his body.

Young Charles chants to himself, to keep from crying.

    YOUNG CHARLES
    Blood of iron, heart of ice. Blood
    of iron, heart of ice. ...

    POLL (O.S.)
    Got a present for the young
gent’lmun. Seeing as it’s
Christmas.

Young Charles, open his eyes to see one of the older boys, POLL, approaching, hands behind his back. In a sudden movement, he flings a DEAD RAT at him.

The other boys laugh.

With a howl of rage, Young Charles launches himself at Poll. But Poll easily pushes him away.

    POLL (CONT’D)
    You’re no better than me, cocker,
and you know it.

The other boys gather round to cheer as Poll commences pummelling Young Charles.

BACK TO:
83A INT STUDY - DAY

Dickens picks up the manuscript, then tosses it into the wastebasket in disgust.

Then abruptly storms out of the room, off to confront his demons.

84 OMIT

85 EXT. WARRENS BLACKING FACTORY

Dickens stands outside decrepit Warren’s Blacking Factory. Slowly, fearfully, he pulls a board off a door and peers inside.

86 INT. WARREN’S BLACKING FACTORY - NIGHT

Dickens walks through the dusty, abandoned warehouse, remembering.

In his imagination, he hears the SOUNDS of SQUEAKING RATS. Of boys LAUGHING.

In the basement, he finds a low bench beneath the window on which are a few dusty POTS OF SHOE-BLACKING.

Scrooge materializes behind him holding a lamp.

SCROOGE

‘ello, Charlie.

Dickens turns to see him.

SCROOGE (CONT’D)

So. This is your miserable secret. The famous author, the inimitable Charles Dickens, was once a scabby little factory boy.

DICKENS

Leave me be.

SCROOGE

A common bit of riffraff, living on scraps, a squalid wretch of no worth to anyone—

Dickens lunges at Scrooge, grabbing at thin air, he falls to the ground, his face reflected across a broken mirror lying on the floor. Scrooge looms over Dickens.
SCROOGE (CONT’D)
Who could ever care for you?
Certainly not your father. He abandoned you.

Dickens struggles to his feet, putting distance between him and Scrooge.

DICKENS
He didn’t -- he -- It wasn’t his fault.

A rotten railing blocking his path. Dickens looks down at a sheer drop into a huge empty blacking vat below. The railing gives way, the squeal of a thousand rats disturbed by the falling woodwork.

SCROOGE
He failed you. Again and again. You said it yourself. Nothing but a drag and chain upon your life.

Dickens turn to look at the fall below. Dickens looks at Scrooge in horror.
DICKENS

Who are you?

Scrooge advances on him, holding his lamp high, forcing Dickens to back up against the sheer drop.

SCROOGE

You know me, Charlie. I’m hunger. I’m cold. I’m darkness.... I’m the shadow on your thoughts, the crack in your heart, the stain on your soul... And I will never leave you.

Dickens holds up his hands as if to block Scrooge’s words.

DICKENS

Go away.

SCROOGE

But we’re having such fun. (beat) People don’t change, Charlie.

DICKENS

They can. They do.
SCROOGE
Lies. Look around. You’re still that scabby boy. No use to anyone. Just like your father.

DICKENS
(angered)
No...

Dickens take a sharp breath in. His eyes blaze.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
“No one is useless in this world who lightens the burden of another.”

SCROOGE
Eh?

DICKENS
(emboldened)
My father taught me that.

Scrooge turns to see an empty grave, with a blank HEADSTONE in the middle of the warehouse floor. Scrooge nervously edges towards it.

SCROOGE
(confused)
Whose grave is that? There’s no name on the headstone.

DICKENS
Why should there be? The man to whom this grave belongs never made himself useful to anyone but himself. No friends. No family. Never felt love, or joy, or took any kind of pleasure in life... It’s time. Mr. Scrooge. We’ve come to the end--

Scrooge unnerved, turns back to Dickens only to see an earth wall where Dickens was stood.

Turning again and then again he realizes he is surrounded by earth walls. Looking up he sees the blank headstone. He realizes he is now inside the empty grave. Dickens appears above, framed by the blacking factory ceiling.

Suddenly the walls of the grave start closing in on Scrooge.

SCROOGE
Please. - I don’t want to die like this, alone, unloved, forgotten.
DICKENS

Too late.
SCROOGE
Never too late! Oh, never too late.
Please. I’ll change.

The grave walls keep closing.

SCROOGE (CONT’D)
—- I will honour Christmas in my
heart, and try to keep it all the
year. I will live in the Past, the
Present and the Future. I will not
shut out the lessons that they
teach.

He looks directly at Dickens, imploring him.

SCROOGE (CONT’D)
Give me another chance. I beg you.
Let me do some good before I die.

The walls stop closing, a beat, then they start opening.
Scrooge is delighted, laughing, crying as the walls pull
back. He smiles, genuinely transformed. Dickens smiles back.

DICKENS
And so we come to the last chapter.

Somewhere, a church bell CHIMES twelve o’clock. Dickens looks
around, shocked to discover that the warehouse is empty and
he is all alone. He lets out a sharp breath.

INT. DICKENS STUDY - NIGHT

He enters taking a deep, steadying breath, then goes over to
his desk and pulls out a new sheet of paper. He writes:
“Stave Five: The End of It.”

INT. DICKENS STUDY - EARLY MORNING

Early morning light filters in through the windows as Dickens
bends over his writing, his pen SCRATCHING AWAY:

DICKENS (V.O.)
Scrooge was better than his word.
He did it all and infinitely more;
and to Tiny Tim who did not die, he
was a second father. And so, as
Tiny Tim observed, God bless us
every one!... The End.

Dickens bundles up the manuscript and rushes downstairs.
EXT/INT. DICKENS HOUSE - MORNING

Dickens rushes to the front door, manuscript in hand. Kate appears in the doorway.

KATE
Charles? There’s someone here to see you.

DICKENS
Not now, Kate. I have to get this to the printers before nine o’clock-

INT. PARLOUR - DAY

Tara is laughing and playing with the children.

DICKENS
Tara? How did you --

TARA
It were Mr. Dickens sir. He heard you were looking for me.

Dickens looks at Kate.

KATE
Your father makes it his business to know things about people.

Tara hands him back his book, Aladdin.

TARA
Thank you for the loan.

DICKENS
Did you like it?

Tara brightens.

TARA
Oh, yes, sir. It was fizzing.

This delights Dickens.
DICKENS
Fizzing! Delightful. You must read Robinson Crusoe next.

Tara looks at him, in surprise.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Tara. I’m sorry for sending you away. It was a mistake. Will you stay?

Tara nods, moved. Dickens smiles.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
And by the way, you were right about Tiny Tim. He doesn’t die. Scrooge helps him to get better.

TARA
Of course. And doesn’t he help Scrooge get better, too?

DICKENS
He does. He does, indeed.

Dickens looks at the mantelpiece, where a magic lantern is sitting.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
Where did that come from?

KATE
A gift. For the children. From your father.

DICKENS
He was here?

KATE
You can still catch him if--

Dickens hesitates, then stuffs the manuscript into his jacket as he rushes towards the door, turns around abruptly, grabs Kate and kisses her.

DICKENS
Kate--

KATE
I know, you don’t deserve me. Go.

He rushes out of the house.
Outside the station, Dickens' cab pulls up. He jumps out and dashes past an enterprising VENDOR who is attempting to interest the passersby in his selection of “Christmas trees”.

VENDOR
...the very latest, the same as what’s in the Queen’s own drawing room...

Dickens enters the station and sees his father and mother on the platform about to get on the train. He leaps over the barrier and runs towards them.

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)
Last call. All aboard.

DICKEYNS
Stop!

A CONSTABLE sees him and blows his whistle.

CONSTABLE
Stop!

Mr. and Mrs. Dickens, just getting on the train, turn to see their son running along the platform.

DICKEYNS
What do you think you are doing?

MRS. DICKEYNS
Please, dear. Don’t make a scene. We’re going away.

DICKEYNS
Oh, no you don’t.

CONSTABLE
Hi! You!

Mr. Dickens sees the Constable, rushing to catch up to them.

MR. DICKEYNS
What have I done?

DICKEYNS
Done? It’s what you haven’t done.

Mrs. Dickens flinches.
MR. DICKENS
I don’t understand—

Dickens laughs, a touch maniacally.

DICKENS
Who is going to carve the turkey?
(to his mother)
Who is going to make the Christmas pudding? It won’t be the same without you?

Mrs. Dickens softens.

MRS. DICKENS
Oh, the pudding. The secret is to warm the treacle first.

Mr. Dickens turns to his wife.

MR. DICKENS
There you see, my dear? I told you something would turn up.

MRS. DICKENS
(through tears)
You did, you did.

Dickens laughs again, joyfully. He embraces them warmly.

The Constable has finally caught up with them. His eyes widen in astonishment.

CONSTABLE
You’re that Charles Dickens.

DICKENS
Guilty.

CONSTABLE
I’m a huge fan.

DICKENS
Thank you.

CONSTABLE
That last one. Chuzzlewit. Wept like a baby, I did.

DICKENS
Well, that’s very— What is your name, Constable?

CONSTABLE
My name? Copperfield, Sir.
Dickens whips out his notebook of names.

DICKENS
Copperfield? Interesting.

CONSTABLE
Any chance of a new book soon?

DICKENS
Eh?

Dickens suddenly pats his coat, remembering the Christmas Carol manuscript stuffed in his jacket. He pulls it out and rushes for a cab.

97A EXT TRAIN STATION - DAY

Manuscript in hand, Dickens runs out of the train station, jumps in a cab.

DICKENS
Shoe Lane. And hurry.

97B EXT PRINTERS - DAY

Dickens arrives at the printer, just as the clock is striking ten. Forster is waiting for him on the street.

FORSTER
Charles. Where have you been? I've been waiting here for an hour.

DICKENS
It's all right. I have the manuscript.

He pulls it out of his coat pocket. Several pages go flying in the wind.

DICKENS (CONT'D)

No!

Forster and Dickens go chasing after the pages. A couple of PASSERSBY stop to help.

97C INT. PRINTERS - DAY

Forster and Dickens run through the halls, past the noisy press room, past the bookbinding room, to the Composing room.

A cranky, ink-stained compositor (MR. GRUB) is just setting up when the two men arrive, out of breath, with the manuscript.
FORSTER
Mr. Grub! We’re here.
The compositor starts and drops a line of type on the floor.

DICKENS
I have the ending! You can finish it now.

MR GRUB
It’s too late.

FORSTER
Come on. You’ve already printed the other four chapters. It’s just one more. Please.

Grub struggles with this.

MR GRUB
I can’t guarantee anything.

DICKENS
Thank you. Thank you!

MR GRUB
(sourly)
I didn’t say I could do it.

INT. GARRICK CLUB - DAY

Dickens waits nervously. He straightens at the sight of Forster, making his way through the crowded room. Finally, he arrives at the table.

DICKENS
Well? For God’s sake man, don’t prolong the agony.

Forster pulls out a package, wrapped in gold paper and tied with a bright red ribbon and hands it to Dickens.

Dickens opens it carefully. Inside is the book. The cover is red, the title stamped in gold: A Christmas Carol, By Charles Dickens. Dickens handles it with awe, turning the pages slowly.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
It’s exactly as I’d imagined it.

THACKERAY (O.S.)
Hello, gents. Extraordinary weather, isn’t it? Looks like snow.
Dickens

Thackeray.

Thackeray holds up a galley copy of the Christmas Carol.

THACKERAY
What’s this I have? Why, it’s your new book. I’m going to review it for this evening’s Spectator. I’m told you wrote it in only six weeks, Charles? What a prodigy you are!

Thackeray throws himself into a nearby armchair, opening the book with a flourish.

Dickens and Forster exchange looks.

INT. DICKENS HOUSE/PARLOUR - NIGHT

Through the parlour windows we see the first Christmas snowfall. The gleaming new chandelier takes pride of place next to a Christmas tree as a splendid party is underway.

Fanny, Henry Sr. and Junior are there, watching as Mr. Dickens, dressed as a conjuror, does some magic tricks for Tara and the children. Mrs. Dickens chatters away to an uncomprehending Signor Mazzini. Mrs. Fisk has been into the punch.

MRS. FISK
(humming to herself....)

Kate appears.

KATE
Good heavens, what is that?

DICKENS
The Germans call it a Tannenbaum. Now that the royal family has one, it’s going to be all the rage.

Grip, the raven, flies onto a branch and eyes Mrs. Fisk.

GRIP
Halloa, old girl. Halloa.

Forster arrives, a blushing Charlotte in tow.
KATE
Miss Wigmore!

Charlotte holds up her hand to show off her engagement ring.

CHARLOTTE
Papa had a change of heart.

Forster brandishes a newspaper.

FORSTER
Charles, I think you’ll want to hear this. It’s by Thackeray.

DICKENS
Not now please, Forster...

FORSTER
(ignoring charles)
"It was a blessed inspiration that put such a book into the head of Charles Dickens...a happy inspiration of the heart, that warms every page. It is impossible to read without a glowing bosom and burning cheeks, between love and shame of our kind...."

The group applauds. Smiling, Dickens holds up a glass of punch:

DICKENS
Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

He smiles at Kate.

DICKENS (CONT’D)
...and those on the way. A toast: I wish you all many merry Christmases, friendships, great accumulation of cheerful recollections and heaven at last for all of us.

At that moment, Grip sees an opportunity and flies up the staircase towards Dickens’ study. We follow him...

INT. DICKENS STUDY - NIGHT

Grip lands on the desk, revealing a happy Scrooge and the POSSE flicking through the newly printed book, giggling at the Leech print of the Fezziwigs.
DICKENS (V.O.)
In the season of hope, we will shut out nothing from our firesides and everyone will be welcome.

Taking off once again GRIP flies through the open window and out over the chimney tops of London...

EXT. HATCHARD’S BOOKSTORE – NIGHT

... Grip lands on the Hatchard’s sign.

DICKENS (V.O.)
Welcome what has been and what is, and what we hope may be, to this shelter underneath the holly.
Happy, happy Christmas to one and all.

Below, a line-up of people trail down the street and around the corner, waiting to purchase their copy of The Carol. We move up and up to reveal the wide snow filled streets of a beautiful bustling Dickensian Christmas world.

FADE OUT.

THE END