

A Christmas Carol Excerpt

A1- 2.CS: SCROOGE AT HIS DESK

NARRATOR

(over Scrooge) This is the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, that miserly, mercenary old man whose answer to anything socially responsible is:

SCROOGE

Bah, Humbug.

NARRATOR

(over SCROOGE) Of course, Dickens doesn't let Scrooge get away with this attitude. He is visited by three ghosts on Christmas Eve who help him see the error of ways.

SCROOGE

(into the camera) The poor are not my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. If the poor would rather die than go to the workhouse, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.

A1- 3.NARRATOR

NARRATOR

So imagine, if you will, London in the mid 1800s. A city of two and a half million where most of the population lived in abject poverty. Where the average lifespan of the poor was just 37 years. Where the wealthy earned three thousand times the yearly salary of Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit. Where a person could spend the rest of their days in the workhouse for not paying a bill. That is, if they first didn't die of cholera, typhoid, small pox, or tuberculosis.

(Crowd noise)

P1- 1. CS SCROOGE

SCROOGE

Out of my way, you heathens! The lot of you!

P1- 2. SCROOGE AT HIS DESK

NARRATOR

(sounds of cold wind, people milling about; a clock chimes "three") Once upon a time – of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve – old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy as well: and he could hear the people in the courtyard outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them.

P1- 3. CS: CLOCK AT 3:00

The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already – it had not been light all day: and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the conspicuous brown air.

P1- 4. FOG OBSCURES THE CLOCK

NARRATOR

The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense, that although the courtyard was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms.

P1- 5. CRATCHIT

(CRATCHIT through open doorway? or split-screen with NARRATOR. Cratchit puts on comforter.)

NARRATOR

The door of Scrooge's office was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of enclosed tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part company.

As the result of which the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at his candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

P1- 6. THE NEPHEW, FRED

FRED

A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

NARRATOR (OVER FRED)

It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, Fred, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first indication he had of his approach.

P1- 7. NOTE: A COMBINATION OF CLOSE-UPS AND TWO SHOTS FOR ALL THE CHARACTERS IN THIS SCENE, THE USE OF WHICH TO BE DETERMINED WHEN EDITING THE VIDEO.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

NARRATOR

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome, and his eyes sparkled.

FRED

Christmas a humbug, uncle! You don't mean that, I am sure.

SCROOGE

I do.. Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough.

FRED

Come, then. What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug.

FRED

Don't be cross, uncle!

SCROOGE

What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Bah! upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? 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!

FRED

Uncle!

SCROOGE

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

FRED

Keep it! But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE

Let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

FRED

There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say. Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!

P1- 8. CS OF CRATCHIT APPLAUDING)

P1- 9. SCROOGE and FRED

SCROOGE

Let me hear another sound from you, Cratchit, and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.

FRED

Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE

Come indeed! I need no family to haunt me.

FRED

But why? Why?

SCROOGE

Why indeed. Why did you get married?

FRED

Because I fell in love."

SCROOGE

Because you fell in love! Good afternoon!

FRED

But uncle, you never came to see me before my marriage. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?"

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

FRED

I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

FRED

I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trip here in honour to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

FRED

And a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

NARRATOR

At length the hour of shutting up the counting house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and by example admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank that the working day had come to an end.

P1- 10. CS OF CANDLE BEING PUT OUT.

P1- 11. CRATCHIT PUTS ON HIS HAT.

P1- 12. SCROOGE AND CRATCHIT

SCROOGE

You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?

CRATCHIT

If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE

It's not convenient, and it's not fair. If I was to hold back half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound? And yet you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work.

CRATCHIT

It's only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE

A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning.

CRATCHIT

Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. Thank you, sir. And Merry Christmas to you.

SCROOGE

Bah!

P1- 13. NARRATOR

(mournful music under the narration)

NARRATOR

Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no warm overcoat), went down a slide on Cornhill Lane like a boy a quarter of his age in honour of it being Christmas Eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt to play at blind man's-buff with his children.

P1- 14. TAVERN AT NIGHT (Code's Mill?)

P1- 15. DISSOLVE TO NARRATOR

NARRATOR

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and spent the rest of the evening with his banker's book, went home to bed.

(footsteps; the wind howls; both cross-fades to eerie music)

P1- 16. CS OF FEET WALKING

P1- 17. NARRATOR

NARRATOR

Scrooge lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in the building but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, had to grope with his hands to get through it. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

(eerie music)

P1- 18. CS OF KNOCKER; THEN CROSS FADE TO NARRATOR

NARRATOR

(over knocker) Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place; also that Scrooge had as little of what is called imagination about him as any man in the city of London. Let it also be known that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley since his last mention of his seven years' dead partner that afternoon. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change – not a knocker, but Marley's face! *(music rises to a crescendo)*

P1- 19. CS OF MARLEY'S FACE; THEN CROSS FADE TO NARRATOR

NARRATOR

Marley's face. Not an impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the yard were, but it had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its purple colour, made it horrible. But as Scrooge looked more closely at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again. To say that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lit his candle.

P1- 20. CS OF HAND WITH KEY INTO LOCK

P1- 21. CS HAND HOLDING CANDLE

NARRATOR

(over #40 and #41) He did pause for a moment's before he shut the door; and he did look cautiously behind it first, as if he half-expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on.

P1- 22. SCROOGE AND NARRATOR, etc. (when editing)

SCROOGE

Pooh, pooh! *(sound of a door closing)*

NARRATOR

The sound resounded throughout the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. But Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes.

SCROOGE

Bah!

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

There are some upon this earth of yours who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and accuse their doings on themselves, not us.

P3 - 1. NARRATOR

NARRATOR

Scrooge promised that he would; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. Straight to Scrooge's clerk's; for there the Spirit went, and he took Scrooge with him, holding on to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinkling of his torch.

P3 - 2. MRS. CRATCHIT

NARRATOR

Then up rose Mrs Cratchit, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but finely arrayed in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she laid the tablecloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also with a fine display of ribbons;

P3 - 3. CS: PETER

NARRATOR

... while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his father's monstrous shirt collar into his mouth. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelled the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he blew on the fire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

P3 - 4. VARIOUS SHOTS: THE CRATCHITS

MRS. CRATCHIT

Wherever is your precious father? And your brother, Tiny Tim; And Martha, she warn't as late last Christmas Day by half-an-hour."

MARTHA

Here's Martha, mother.

TWO YOUNG CRATCHITS

Here's Martha, mother! Hurrah! Come and see, Martha. There's such a goose!"

MRS. CRATCHIT

Why, bless your heart alive, my dear Martha. How late you are!"

MARTHA

We'd a deal of work to finish up last night and I had to clear away this morning, mother.

MRS. CRATCHITS

Well, never mind so long as you are come. Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye."

TWO YOUNG CRATCHITS

No, no. There's father coming. Hide, Martha, hide!

P3 - 5. NARRATOR

NARRATOR

So Martha hid herself, and in came Bob Cratchit, the father, with at least three feet of comforter exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame.

P3 - 6. VARIOUS SHOTS: THE CRATCHITS (NARRATOR?)

BOB CRATCHIT

Why, where's our Martha?

MRS. CRATCHIT

Not coming.

BOB CRATCHIT

Not coming! Not coming upon Christmas Day?

NARRATOR

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper kettle.

MRS. CRATCHIT

And how did little Tim behave?

BOB CRATCHIT

As good as gold and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.

NARRATOR

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

(sound of Tiny Tim's crutch as he walks)

P3 - 7. CS: TINY TIM

NARRATOR

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs -- as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby -- made a hot

mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the shelf near the fire to simmer; Master Peter, and the two ever-present young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

P3 - 8. THE CRATCHITS

BOB CRATCHIT

Never was such a goose, I say. Never such a goose cooked so tender, so full of flavour.

NARRATOR

Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Why, we haven't eaten it all, yet look how all ye are satisfiedly stuffed enough. And look to the youngest. Why they are steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows.

P3 - 9. NARRATOR/MRS. CRATCHIT

NARRATOR

Now after the plates have been cleared, Mrs Cratchit left the room alone, nervous to get the pudding and bring it in. Suppose it should not be done enough? Suppose it should break in turning out? All sorts of horrors were supposed.

But in half a minute, Mrs. Cratchit entered -- flushed, but smiling proudly -- with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in ignited brandy, and decked out with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

P3 - 10. THE CRATCHITS/NARRATOR

BOB CRATCHIT

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Why I do believe it is your greatest success. Mrs Cratchit, since these years we have been married.

NARRATOR

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The mixture in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass: Two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle. These held the hot stuff from the jug, as well as any golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily.

BOB CRATCHIT

A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us.

THE FAMILY

A Merry Christmas to us all. God bless us.

P3 - 11. CS: TINY TIM

TINY TIM

God bless us *every one*!

P3 - 12. SPLIT SCREEN: BOB CRATCHIT AND TINY TIM

NARRATOR

Tiny Tim sat very close to his father's side upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

P3 - 13. SCROOGE/GHOST

SCROOGE

Spirit tell me if Tiny Tim will live.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I see a vacant seat in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.

SCROOGE

No, no. Oh, no, kind Spirit. Say he will be spared.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.

NARRATOR

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Man, if man you be in heart, not obstinate, restrain yourself from that wicked humbug until you have discovered what the surplus is, and where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child.

NARRATOR

Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily, on hearing his own name.

P3 - 14. THE CRATCHITS

BOB CRATCHIT

Mr Scrooge! A toast. I give you Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!

MRS. CRATCHIT

The Founder of the Feast indeed! I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it.

BOB CRATCHIT

My dear, the children. Christmas Day.

MRS. CRATCHIT

It should be Christmas Day, I am sure on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr Scrooge. You know he is, Robert. Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow.

BOB CRATCHIT

My dear. Christmas Day.

MRS. CRATCHIT

I'll drink his health for your sake not for his. Then long life to him. A merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!