

THE DICKENS YOU SAY

Written by
JERRY ROBBINS

jrscreenwriter60@gmail.com

INT. COPLEY'S BOOKS - DAY

BROOKE COPLEY, 30, works behind a desk buried in Victorian novels and worn hardcovers.

Perky, pretty, masking a lonely fatigue she never shows to her customers.

The bell RINGS.

DOT WESTMORE, 30s, funk and heavily made up, enters with snow on her coat.

SUPER: DEC. 22nd.

DOT

Baby, it's cold out there!

BROOKE

Dot. What brings you out this early in the afternoon?

Dot stares at her.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

What?

More staring.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

What!? Oh, no!

BROOKE (CONT'D)

Christmas shopping!

DOT

Christmas shopping and you forgot.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

I did. Sorry. I've been cataloging these new titles.

DOT

May I speak with candor?

BROOKE

When have you not?

DOT

No one's in the store because you don't want to be here.

BROOKE

I used to love old books. I think that died with Dad.

DOT

This place is a relic. Like the books you sell. Your dad left it to you. You gave it two years. It's time.

The bell RINGS.

The heavy and balding JOE TRAVIS, 60s, balding banker in a mustard-stained suit, enters.

JOE

Miss Copley.

BROOKE

Mister Travis.

He places his briefcase on the counter and opens it.

JOE

Yuletide greetings from the Castle Hill Savings and Loan.

BROOKE

I just need more time.

JOE

Your store's mortgage payment is late.

BROOKE

I know. Business has been slow.

He hands her an envelope.

JOE

My bank has been charitable.

DOT

Ha!

BROOKE

Dot.

Dot gives an apologetic shrug.

JOE

Another matter.

BROOKE

What now?

JOE
You're behind on your home
mortgage.

BROOKE
Only by a few days!

JOE
Late is late.

BROOKE
Dad's medical insurance didn't
cover everything and --

JOE
It's business. Nothing personal.

BROOKE
I only have two payments left!

JOE
You should only have one left. Can
you pay today?

She lowers her eyes.

BROOKE
No.

He snaps the briefcase shut.

JOE
Then expect another notice. Merry
Christmas.

He exits.

Brooke stares at the dusty stack books.

BROOKE
Maybe it's for the best. These
speak to another time.

DOT
This is depressing. Get your coat.
We're going shopping

BROOKE
I'm really not up to it.

DOT
You love shopping! Spend money!
It'll help!

BROOKE

Dot...

DOT

Oh. Sorry. I wasn't thinking.

BROOKE

It's all right.

DOT

Lunch then? My treat?

BROOKE

No, thanks. Not hungry.

DOT

Call me if you change your mind.
You don't have to be alone.

BROOKE

Thanks, Dot.

DOT

Merry Christmas.

She exits. Bell RINGS.

BROOKE

Merry Christmas.

Brooke leans back, staring at the books.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CASTLE HILL, MA - DAY

Dot walks down the snowy sidewalk, turns a corner.

EXT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER - DAY

She passes the marquee: A CHRISTMAS CAROL. LIVE ON STAGE.
DEC. 23.

INT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER AUDITORIUM - DAY

On stage, a *Cratchit home* set barely holds together.

Bad costumes.

Bad actors.

TARQUIN FLEMING, 7, in rags and a modern metal crutch,
itches violently.

ACTOR SCROOGE
 A Merry Christmas, Bob Cratchit!
 And to you, good lady! A merrier
 Christmas than I have --

Tarquin frantically scratches his arms, legs, and face.

ACTOR SCROOGE (CONT'D)
 I'll raise your salary... and...
 endeavor to assist your struggling
 family...

Tarquin faces the audience and strikes a "TA-DA" pose.

TARQUIN
 God Bless Us, Every One!

-- and instantly returns to his feverish scratching.

ACTOR SCROOGE
 Like I said... I'll raise your
 salary... and...
 (drops character)
 Why are you scratching so much!?

TARQUIN
 I can't help it!

ACTOR SCROOGE
 Norm, I can't act under these
 conditions!

ACTOR BOB CRATCHIT
 You can't act under any
 conditions.

ACTOR SCROOGE
 Just because you didn't get the
 lead --

NORM SILVESTRI, 50s, jumps out of his front row seat.

SILVESTRI
 All right! Enough!
 (to Tarquin)
 You said your line too early.

TARQUIN
 I wanted to get it over with.

SILVESTRI
 Why the scratching?
 (leans in, sees rash)

TARQUIN

I think it was the pizza we had backstage. I have a food allergy with pizza.

SILVESTRI

Why did you eat it!?

TARQUIN

It's all there was!

SILVESTRI

How long does it usually last!?

TARQUIN

A few days.

SILVESTRI

We open in two days!

Actor Scrooge takes a few steps back.

ACTOR SCROOGE

Are allergies contagious?

EXT. MAIN STREET - CASTLE HILL - DAY

A sleek car pulls up outside the book store.

HUGH CHATWIN, 30s, movie star handsome in a tailored coat and Oxfordian accent, steps out with a canvas bag.

INT. COPLEY'S BOOKS - DAY

Brooke tallies numbers.

The bell RINGS.

BROOKE

Welcome to Copley's Books.

She looks up.

She sees him.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

Oh! Good morning -- afternoon!

HUGH

Afternoon. I was wondering if you could help me.

BROOKE
Of course! Merry Christmas!

HUGH
Yes. Merry Christmas...

He reveals a red leather book.

HUGH (CONT'D)
My Great-grandfather, Binny... I
mean, Bernard Chatwin, left me
this. Can't imagine why.

She stares at it, stunned.

BROOKE
Dickens.

A connection sparks between them.

BROOKE (CONT'D)
"A Christmas Carol!" That looks
like...

Brooke opens the cover.

BROOKE (CONT'D)
It is. First edition.

HUGH
Yes.

BROOKE
"Published by Chapman and Hall,
December 19, 1843." Only five
thousand printed.

HUGH
Six thousand.

BROOKE
Sold out in weeks.

HUGH
Days.

She smiles.

HUGH (CONT'D)
I don't know much about antique
books. Just looked it up.

BROOKE
It's in amazing condition.

HUGH

He said it was magic.

(with a chuckle)

In fact a note that came with it
said never to read it in one
sitting...

(in a brittle voice)

"You can get carried away by it,
Hugh... which is not always a good
thing!"

BROOKE

You're Hugh?

HUGH

Hugh Chatwin.

BROOKE

I'm Brooke. Copley.

HUGH

Like the sign out front.

BROOKE

That's me... well, my father's,
but now mine.

They lock eyes.

HUGH

I prefer e-books. Not as heavy.

She turns a page. Dickens' signature.

BROOKE

Is this real!? Charles Dickens!?

HUGH

It's been in my family since the
day Dickens gave it to us.

She's clearly smitten.

BROOKE

Why bring it in? You're not
selling, are you?

HUGH

Just wanted it appraised for
insurance.

She's lost in his eyes.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Hello?

She snaps back.

BROOKE

Oh! Sorry! I haven't eaten today
and I guess I --

HUGH

Then you should.

BROOKE

-- I'd love to!

(awkward)

I mean... that came out wrong... I
didn't mean... have you had lunch?

EXT. CASTLE DINER - MAIN STREET - DAY

Shoppers pass a cozy, Christmas-lit storefront diner.

BROOKE (V.O.)

Do you live in Castle Hill?

HUGH (V.O.)

Just moved here, actually.

INT. CASTLE DINER - DAY

Classic booths, holiday garland.

Brooke and Hugh share burgers and fried.

The canvas bag rests beside them.

BROOKE

From England?

HUGH

Originally. More recently
Springfield -- Massachusetts. I
work at the mayor's office.

BROOKE

A government official?

HUGH

Public relations. I help him look
good on camera.

BROOKE
Sounds like a challenge.

HUGH
You have no idea.

BROOKE
Well, I'm glad you're here.

HUGH
So am I.

They sit in that beat -- soft, growing.

BROOKE
So... the book?

HUGH
Yes! You didn't tell me what it's worth.

BROOKE
In this condition? Thirty-five thousand. Signed? At least seven more.

HUGH
Lovely. Why don't you take it home and read it?

BROOKE
You're serious?

HUGH
I am. I know you'll enjoy it. Besides, it gives us a reason to see each other again... say... tomorrow?

She's moved.

BROOKE
To read Charles Dickens' actual copy...

HUGH
Settled.

BROOKE
Tomorrow.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - NIGHT

Warm holiday lights. Candles in the windows.

DOT (V.O.)

So you threw yourself at him!?

BROOKE (V.O.)

I didn't "throw" myself at him. I just get nervous and fluttery and say stupid things.

INT. BROOKE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lit only by a Christmas candle and the firelight from another room.

Brooke speaks into her phone.

BROOKE

Next thing I knew we were at the diner.

DOT (V.O.)

When are we going to see him again?

BROOKE

"We" are not. I am. Tomorrow.

DOT (V.O.)

What if he's a criminal!?

BROOKE

Goodnight, Dot.

DOT (V.O.)

If he's a criminal you can sell the book, pay the bank!

BROOKE

Merry Christmas!

Brooke ends the call, grabs wine, and exits.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Firelight flickers. Brooke settles in with the red leather book.

She opens the title page.

BROOKE (V.O.)
 "May it haunt their houses
 pleasantly." Charles Dickens.
 December, 1843."

She turns the page.

BROOKE (V.O.)
 Marley was dead: to begin with.

A SNAP from the fireplace makes her jump. She laughs nervously and reads on.

MONTAGE - BROOKE READING "A CHRISTMAS CAROL"

-- Brooke curled in the chair, wine glass in hand.
 -- The clock: 8:00... 8:30... 9:15... 10:00...
 -- Pages flip as she reads, lost in the story.
 -- Flickering shadows dance across her face.
 -- Snow begins falling outside the window.
 -- Woodcut illustrations on the pages catch the firelight: Marley's chains... the Ghosts... Tiny Tim.
 -- Brooke reacts softly to the text -- a smile here, a tear there.

BROOKE (V.O.)
 "Spirit, tell me... will Tiny Tim
 live?"

-- She pulls the blanket tighter, drawn in.
 -- The fire dims.
 -- She turns the last page.

BROOK (V.O.)
 "And so, as Tiny Tim observed...
 God Bless us, every one."

The clock strikes 11:00.

END MONTAGE.

She closes it the book, hugs it, smiling.

Brooke rises from the chair and places the book on the coffee table.

INT. THE STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Brooke climbs slowly.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The book sits on the coffee table.

It flips open on its own.

A blue mist rises. Sparkles swirl.

INT. BROOKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clock reads 3:00 AM

A faint CLANG -- the fridge door SLAMS downstairs.

Brooke stirs.

Another BANG. A cookie tray.

MUFFLED VOICE (O.S.)

Shhhh!

INT. THE STAIRWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Brooke descends with caution.

INT. BROOKE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The refrigerator door is open.

She reaches for the light.

CLICK!

SCROOGE, 60s, jumps up from behind the door, startled!

They SCREAM!

AHHH!
SCROOGE

AHHH!
BROOKE

BROOKE (CONT'D)
Who are you!? How did you get in!?

Scrooge, in his black suit and top hat, is no longer the tight-fisted hand at the grindstone. This is the transformed Scrooge.

SCROOGE

My dear, you gave me such a start!

BROOKE

Who are you!?

SCROOGE

Ebenezer Scrooge, at your service.

BROOKE

Is this a joke? I'm seeing things.
Too much wine.

She backs out of the kitchen.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

She grabs the phone --

BROOKE

You better leave! I'm calling nine-
one-one!

Brooke backs into the easy chair and sits.

She immediately leaps up with a SCREAM!

BROOKE (CONT'D)

AHHHH!

TINY TIM

AHHHH!

Brooke turns to see the diminutive TINY TIM, 10, in the chair. His crutch leans against the armrest.

TINY TIM (CONT'D)

Hello, Miss!

Tiny Tim springs out of the chair. His legs are no longer in braces, and he stands without the aid of the crutch.

Brooke's mouth is agape. She can't speak.

TINY TIM (CONT'D)

Wot's the matter?

BROOKE

You -- you're not real!

SCROOGE

Binny Chatwin told you it was a
magic book, didn't he?

BROOKE

I got this from... Hu... Hugh
Chatwin. His great-grandson.

SCROOGE

Oh, dear. Old Binny must have
popped his clogs.

BROOKE

What?

SCROOGE

Gone to his great reward.

BROOKE

Are you... from the book!?

BELLE, 20, a fair young girl in a mourning dress, enters.

BELLE

It matters little. Very little,
for we are here.

SCROOGE

Belle! Belle, it's you!

BELLE

Sir? I do not know you.

SCROOGE

Belle, it's me! It's Ebenezer!

She squints for a closer look. Scrooge stares back with
amorous eyes as he removes his hat.

BELLE

Who?

SCROOGE

Scrooge!

BELLE

Nonsense. My Ebenezer is but one
and twenty.

SCROOGE

Even if I have grown so much
wiser, what then? I am not changed
towards you.

YOUNG SCROOGE, 21, Scrooge's former self, enters briskly.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Belle! Are you all right?

BELLE

Ebby. This man tells me he is you!

Young Scrooge studies Scrooge, who does the same.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Sir. Make yourself known.

SCROOGE

It's me! I'm you! You're me!

BELLE

I swear to you, Ebby, I have not seen this withered old fossil before this eve.

SCROOGE

Fossil!? Belle!

BROOKE

Hello!? Excuse me!

All heads turn toward Brooke.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

Now, I don't know who you are... well, I know who you think you are, but you're not actually who you think you are because that's not possible.

TINY TIM

Wot she say?

A bright light shines from the hallway.

BOOMING LAUGHTER echoes through the house.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (O.S.)

HO! HO! HO! Come in, Brooke! Come in!

Brooke storms past Belle and Young Scrooge.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Brook approaches a closed door. A super-nova bright light emanates from it.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Come in and know me better!

INT. BROOKE'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Brooke enters the room as the bright light dims to reveal THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT, 50s, a jolly giant, in a simple green robe bordered with white fur.

A tall staff with the jewel-encrusted cup of human kindness at the top is always in his grasp.

The room sparkles with holly, mistletoe, roasting turkeys, pies, and seething bowls of punch.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Look upon me! I am the Ghost of
Christmas Present!

Brooke faints and hits the floor with a THUD.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (CONT'D)

Oh, my.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Brooke lies on the couch, a cold cloth on her forehead, surrounded by her visitors.

SCROOGE

You scared her!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I thought she was expecting us so
I gave her the whole shebang!

YOUNG SCROOGE

Didn't Binny tell her?

TINY TIM

Binny popped his clogs.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Oh. How sad.

Brooke opens her eyes.

BROOKE

You're still here.

SCROOGE

Yes, my dear.

BROOKE

You're not burglars?

TINY TIM

Naw! That's a hanging offense!

BROOKE

Who are you? For real?

SCROOGE

I am Ebenezer Scrooge, this is the lovely Belle, to whom I was once engaged.

YOUNG SCROOGE

To whom I *am* engaged!

SCROOGE

Your greed will be your undoing.

YOUNG SCROOGE

What!?

SCROOGE

And this is Tiny Tim. Young Me, and the Ghost of Christmas Present.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You have never seen the like of me before!

BROOKE

How did you get here?

TINY TIM

We're your favorites!

BROOKE

Favorites?

TINY TIM

From the book!

Brooke is confused.

SCROOGE

We are the first edition to come off the press.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

The very first copy. Given to Mr. Dickens.

SCROOGE

And you read Dickens' own copy. In one sitting.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
And during the Christmas season.

TINY TIM
That's the trick.

BROOKE
So only the reader's favorite
characters come to life?

Young Scrooge is smitten by this as he steps toward
Brooke with a wry smile.

YOUNG SCROOGE
You fancied me, did you?

She gestures to Scrooge.

BROOKE
Until you became him.

YOUNG SCROOGE
Impossible!

BELLE
Thank goodness I released you.

Scrooge surveys the room with a suspicious eye.

SCROOGE
Are we not in Upton Snodsbury?

BROOKE
This is Castle Hill,
Massachusetts.

The characters gasp.

TINY TIM
Blimey!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
You know who we are. Might we ask
who you are?

BROOKE
My name is Brooke Copley, and it's
nice to meet you. But I really
need you to go back inside the
book.

SCROOGE
We can't return until Christmas
Eve.

BROOKE
You can't stay here! I have work.

SCROOGE
Work?

YOUNG SCROOGE
A woman?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Impossible.

BELLE
Shocking.

TINY TIM
Walker!

BROOKE
Yes, women work. Some even run
businesses.

YOUNG SCROOGE
But are they successful?

She falters.

BROOKE
Most of them are.

SCROOGE
There's much to see.

BROOKE
Oh, no! You can't!

TINY TIM
Ain't never been to America
before!

Brooke plops into the easy chair and buries her head in
her hands.

BROOKE
This is a nightmare. It's not
happening. It's not happening!

She sits up and finds herself face to face with Tiny Tim.

TINY TIM
Wot's not happenin', Miss?

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

The early morning sun warms a formidable stone building on a very quiet Main Street.

SUPER: DEC. 23rd.

INT. HUGH'S OFFICE - CITY HALL - DAY

Briefcase in hand, a very chipper Hugh enters and plops down in his chair behind his desk.

WENDY, 20s, a co-worker, pops her head in his doorway.

WENDY

You're in super early!

HUGH

Didn't sleep too well.

WENDY

You met someone!

HUGH

What makes you say that?

WENDY

It's all over your face. What's she like?

His face glows with a happy memory.

HUGH

Attractive, runs a business...
wonderful personality... but
lonely.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

The early morning sun peeks over the rooftop.

TINY TIM (V.O.)

The gruel here is much better than
at home!

INT. BROOKE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Tiny Tim, Scrooge, and Christmas Present eat breakfast at the table. Young Scrooge, a copper pan in hand, studies the panel of the microwave.

SCROOGE

What are you doing with that?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Brooke used this to heat coffee. I wish to heat up this gruel.

SCROOGE

Use the stove.

He opens the microwave door and leans in for a closer look inside.

Brooke, in early morning bustle mode, enters and pours coffee into a thermos.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Brooke. About these rules of yours.

BROOKE

Mr. Scrooge. It's important. No one can leave the house!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I never thought I would see the day when a mortal would be ashamed of us!

BROOKE

I'm not ashamed of you. I just don't know how I would explain you!

At the microwave, Young Scrooge places the copper pot inside and closes the door.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

What's to explain!? I am the Ghost of Christmas Present!

BROOKE

That's my point. We don't have ghosts walking down the streets of Castle Hill!

TINY TIM

What about the rest of us? We ain't ghosts!

BROOKE

Rule number one -- don't answer the door when I'm not here.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

Rule number two -- do not answer
the telephone. You know what a
telephone is?

Brooke doesn't pay attention to the BEEP BEEP... BEEP
BEEP BEEP of the microwave buttons being pushed.

TINY TIM

Binny had one.

The motor GRINDS.

BROOKE

And rule number three -- under no
circumstances are you to go
outside.

Muffled SNAPS and POPS!

TINY TIM

That's a bit harsh, Miss.

The SNAPS and POPS intensify!

BROOKE

What's that noise!?

A loud EXPLOSION as the microwave door bursts open with a
cloud of black smoke and a shower of orange sparks!

Brooke SCREAMS as smoke fills the room and the FIRE
ALARMS BUZZES!

BROOKE (CONT'D)

What did you do!?

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

A Fire Engine is parked in the driveway with firemen
securing hoses and equipment to the truck.

Brooke stares at the activity with a vacant expression.

Scrooge, Tiny Tim, Young Scrooge, and Christmas Present
watch from behind a tree at the far side of the house.

A FIREMAN approaches her.

FIREMAN

Nothing serious... just a lot of
smoke and some light burns on the
ceiling from the sparks.

She gives an embarrassed smile.

FIREMAN (CONT'D)
You don't put copper pans into a
microwave oven.

BROOKE
It was a mistake.

FIREMAN
You were lucky.

He returns to his truck as --

JOE (O.S.)
Miss Copley!?

She turns to see an angry Joe hurry up to her in the same
mustard-stained suit and an envelope in his hand.

With a quick glance at her Dickensian friends, she gives
them a quick "shoo" of the hand and they pull closer to
the tree for cover.

JOE (CONT'D)
What happened here!?

BROOKE
Just a slight accident with the
microwave.

JOE
A slight accident!? There's a
firetruck in the yard!

BROOKE
There were sparks.

JOE
I see.

BROOKE
What brings you here, Mister
Travis?

JOE
I thought I'd stop by on my way to
work. Save myself a stamp!

He hands her the envelope.

BROOKE
Mister Travis, please --

JOE

I am sorry, Miss Copley, but your payment schedule is as clear as a bell!

Brooke has a realization. A fast glance toward the tree.

BROOKE

Bell!? Where's Belle!?

JOE

What!?

EXT. TOWN PARK - DAY

A carefree Belle wanders through the park as if hoping to be noticed.

A POLICE OFFICER, 30s, approaches from the other direction. He can't help but notice the dress.

POLICE OFFICER

Good morning.

BELLE

Good morrow, Sir.

POLICE OFFICER

That's some dress you have there.

BELLE

What do you mean?

POLICE OFFICER

You just don't see many like that these days.

BELLE

This, Sir, is my mourning dress. I am in mourning.

POLICE OFFICER

Oh. Oh, I'm sorry for your loss.

BELLE

The loss, Sir, is his.

POLICE OFFICER

His? I don't understand.

BELLE

Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort him in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.

The Police Officer is genuinely saddened.

BELLE (CONT'D)

May he be happy in the life he has chosen.

She continues on her way, leaving the confused Police Officer behind.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Tiny Tim relaxes on the sofa as he reads a magazine.

The phone RINGS.

He answers it.

TINY TIM

Hello?

INT. HUGH'S OFFICE - CITY HALL - DAY

Hugh is surprised to hear the young voice on the other end of his call.

HUGH

Yes... hello... I'm not certain I have the correct number...

INTERCUT: HUGH/TINY TIM

TINY TIM

I'm not certain either.

HUGH

I'm looking for Brooke Copley of Copley Books.

TINY TIM

She ain't here.

HUGH

But, she lives there, doesn't she?

TINY TIM
When she's at home.

Hugh is perplexed.

HUGH
To whom am I speaking?

TINY TIM
Timothy.

HUGH
Do you live there as well?

TINY TIM
I do.

HUGH
How about I call later.

TINY TIM
If you like.

HUGH
Maybe I'll drop by her store at
lunch.

TINY TIM
Up to you, Gov'na.

HUGH
Thank you.

TINY TIM
Ain't it amazing -- how I can hear
your voice?

HUGH
I suppose... goodbye.

TINY TIM
Ta.

Tiny Tim hangs up the phone.

TINY TIM (CONT'D)
I'm bored.

Hugh hangs up, lost in confusion.

HUGH
There's a kid living there?

EXT. A STREET IN CASTLE HILL - DAY

Brooke's car drives at a slow speed. In the passenger seat, Scrooge keeps a sharp watch out the window.

INT. BROOKE'S CAR - DAY

Brooke watches the road ahead with quick glances out the side window.

BROOKE

She can't have gone far. Let's just hope she doesn't get run over by a bus.

SCROOGE

I never thought these horseless carriages would become popular. Thought they were a lot of humbug!

BROOKE

There she is.

Brooke sees Belle ahead, walking casually.

EXT. BROOKE'S CAR - DAY

Brooke pulls over and winds the window down.

BROOKE

Belle, please get in the car.

BELLE

I would rather walk.

BROOKE

I'm late for work. Please get in.

SCROOGE

Do as she says, Belle.

BELLE

It matters little. To you, very little.

BROOKE

Please stop quoting lines from the book! I'm losing patience here.

Scrooge gets out of the car and opens the rear door.

SCROOGE

Please, enter.

Their voices grow louder.

BELLE

You are changed. When I loved you,
you were another man.

SCROOGE

I was a boy!

BELLE

Your own feeling tells you that
you were not what you are! I am.
That which promised happiness when
we were one in heart is fraught
with misery now that we are two!

Brooke jumps out of the car and yells.

BROOKE

Get in the car, now!

This shocks Belle and Scrooge. They get into the car.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

Brooke pulls into her driveway.

INT. BROOKE'S CAR - DAY

BROOKE

I need to get to the shop.
Remember, stay inside and do not
answer the door or the telephone.

Scrooge and Belle exit the car.

SCROOGE

Can you bring back some gruel, if
it's quite convenient?

Brooke backs out of the driveway as she yells out the
open window.

BROOKE

It's not convenient!

Belle gives a smirk.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Christmas Present and Young Scrooge have dire expressions as they hear the front door CLOSE.

Scrooge and Belle enter.

SCROOGE

We're back. Miss Copley has gone to her place of business. Why the faces of concern?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

We have another problem.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Tiny Tim is missing.

SCROOGE

Missing!?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

He must have gone out the kitchen door when we were not paying attention.

SCROOGE

How could you not be paying attention?

Christmas Present holds up a remote control, and CLICK!

All eyes turn to the television that shows a HOST holding a microphone in front of a colorful curtain.

HOST

And welcome back to the next half-hour of the greatest game show on television -

Christmas Present MUTES the television.

BELLE

What-is-that-thing?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I'm not certain. Binny never had one. People guess prices of everyday items, and if they are correct, they win prizes! It's like Christmas, every day!

SCROOGE

About Tiny Tim?

EXT. MAIN STREET - CASTLE HILL, MA - DAY

Sidewalks are busy with holiday shoppers.

INT. COPLEY'S BOOKS - DAY

The bell on the door RINGS as Hugh enters to discover Brooke, lost in a thick book.

He waits at the counter. Brooke is oblivious.

HUGH

Ahem.

She jumps with fright!

BROOKE

AH! Hugh! You gave me a scare!

HUGH

I'm terribly sorry. I thought you would have heard the bell.

BROOKE

Belle? What about Belle!? Did she run off again -- Oh! Oh, the bell that rings... over the door.

HUGH

(genuinely concerned)
Are you all right?

BROOKE

Yes... I didn't get much sleep last night. I read the book.

HUGH

Not all of it!?

She zones in on him to search for what he may know.

BROOKE

All of it. In one sitting.

He only smiles.

HUGH

The note from my great-grandfather cautioned about doing such a thing.

BROOKE

He was wise.

HUGH

Then again, I would imagine the story truly comes alive when one reads it all at once.

BROOKE

Do you?

HUGH

Characters must seem to leap off the page!

BROOKE

So -- you know?

HUGH

Know what?

BROOKE

About the book?

He's lost.

HUGH

I know you borrowed it.

BROOKE

Anything else?

HUGH

What else could there be?

She studies him.

BROOKE

Have you ever read it?

HUGH

No. Seen one of the movies, though.

BROOKE

Oh.

HUGH

I stopped by to see if you would like to join me for lunch?

She is lost in thought. His words catch up to her after a moment and a smile appears on her lips.

HUGH (CONT'D)

I know a place.

EXT. MAPLE STREET - DAY

Scrooge and Belle make their way along the sidewalk on a street lined with houses.

BELLE

Where could he have run off to?

SCROOGE

I haven't had the chance to tell you how lovely you are, Belle.

BELLE

You had your chance and muffed it.

SCROOGE

That was my younger self. I am different now! I love Christmas! I love people!

BELLE

You are the Ebenezer from Stave Five, The End of It. I remain in Stave Two, The First of the Three Spirits.

SCROOGE

But why should that matter now!? I am here! I am a changed man!

BELLE

You are also a wilted seventy, whilst I am in the full bloom of twenty. We are staves apart. It can never be.

SCROOGE

There are always possibilities, Belle.

BELLE

Not with me. We should return. Miss Copley shall not like our wandering through Castle Hill.

SCROOGE

She'll never know. We'll have Tiny Tim back home before a man can say Jack Robinson!

EXT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER - DAY

Tiny Tim stands before the old building, crutch in hand but unused.

He reads two signboards: CASTLE HILL LITTLE THEATER
PRESENTS A CHRISTMAS CAROL. DEC. 23 ONLY.

EMERGENCY TINY TIM AUDITIONS TODAY!

Behind him arrives MRS. PIPPINS, 60s, a plump matron with thick makeup, big glasses, and elaborate hair.

MRS. PIPPINS

Oh! You're running late, young man! Come along!

TINY TIM

Excuse me, Miss?

She takes Tiny Tim by the arm and practically drags him into the building.

INT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER AUDITORIUM - DAY

In the front row of seats are FOUR BOYS, 10-ish. All are nicely dressed and have perfectly combed hair.

On stage, another boy, PHILLIP, 10, speaks with a bad English accent as he stumbles through his speech.

Their MOTHERS sit behind them. Phillip's mother, ANN, 30s, mouths the lines as her son speaks.

PHILLIP

I hope the people saw me in the church, because I am a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see. God Bless Us, Every One!

Silvestri paces in front of the stage.

SILVESTRI

Thank you, thank you! Very nice.

Phillip leaves the stage and returns to his seat.

Mrs. Pippins enters, dragging Tiny Tim with her as she plows down the aisle.

MRS. PIPPINS

Sorry, I'm late! Sorry, sorry!

She plunks Tiny Tim next to the other boys, who give him subtle, evil looks.

MRS. PIPPINS (CONT'D)

Mister Silvestri, I found this one waiting outside! I think he's shy.

BOY 2

He can't be shy if he's walking around town dressed like that!

The boys laugh.

SILVESTRI

Thank you, Mrs. Pippins.

MRS. PIPPINS

And I want to thank you again for casting me as the young, voluptuous Belle!

SILVESTRI

It's just one scene. I thought it best.

Mrs. Pippins takes a seat.

Mister Silvestri turns to Tiny Tim.

SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

Young man, as you know, little Tarquin Fleming, our Tiny Tim, needed to drop out. Therefore, these auditions are to find a replacement.

Phillip shoots his hand up.

SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

Yes?

PHILLIP

Will we not be considered because we didn't wear a costume to the audition?

SILVESTRI

They are not required.

Tiny Tim whispers to BOY 4.

TINY TIM

We were supposed to wear costumes?

Silvestri points to Tiny Tim.

SILVESTRI

Let's start with you. Can you come
up on stage?

Tiny Tim shrugs and makes his way onto the stage, under
the glare of the other boys.

SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

What's your name?

TINY TIM

Timothy Cratchit, but everyone
calls me Tiny Tim.

Phillip whispers to BOY 2.

PHILLIP

A method actor.

SILVESTRI

Do you live in Castle Hill?

TINY TIM

No, Sir. Camden Town.

SILVESTRI

New Jersey?

TINY TIM

No, Sir. England.

PHILLIP

Is he for real?

Silvestri, puzzled, hands Tiny Tim a script.

SILVESTRI

Here is the script.

Tiny Tim glances at it and hands it back.

TINY TIM

I know it, thank you.

SILVESTRI

Begin when you're ready!

Silvestri hurries off the stage and into his seat.

Tiny Tim puts the crutch under his arm. He speaks quietly, with great sincerity, pain, yearning, and hope.

TINY TIM

I hope the people saw me in the church, because I am a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.

He steps to the edge of the stage.

TINY TIM (CONT'D)

It's getting dark and snowing pretty heavily.

Silvestri looks at his script with confusion. He turns pages, looking for the lines.

TINY TIM (CONT'D)

All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and by-and-by we had a song, about a lost child travelling in the snow. There was nothing of high mark in this. We were not a handsome family; we were not well dressed; our shoes were far from being water-proof; our clothes were scanty; and my brother Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's.

Tears drip from his eyes.

TINY TIM (CONT'D)

But, we were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time. God Bless us. God Bless us... every one.

The room is silent. All four boys have tears in their eyes, as do Mrs. Pippins and Silvestri.

SILVESTRI

Where did you come from again!?

INT. CASTLE DINER - DAY

There is a small lunchtime crowd. Brooke and Hugh are in a booth talking over their lunches.

HUGH

I think this is the best hamburger I've ever had. This is a wonderful restaurant.

BROOKE

Hugh... about the book. There's something you should know.

HUGH

You told me the value.

BROOKE

No, not that. Hugh... this book is not what it seems.

HUGH

Don't tell me it's "A Tale of Two Cities!?"

BROOKE

Please! The last thing I need is Madame Defarge in my living room!

HUGH

(laughs)
What!?

BROOKE

I mean... about the book --

HUGH

By the way, I called your home earlier.

BROOKE

My home?

HUGH

To invite you to lunch. Your number is listed, I hope you don't mind.

BROOKE

Not at all, but I didn't hear the... oh. I was out.

HUGH

So I was told.

Brooke goes full alert.

BROOKE

Told!? Who told you!?

HUGH
The young chap at your house.

BROOKE
Young chap?

HUGH
Is he a younger brother?

BROOKE
Who?

HUGH
Timothy.

BROOKE
Timothy!? No! No, he's not!

HUGH
...your son?

BROOKE
Son!? No! Just a... visitor.
Unexpected.

HUGH
Ah! All right, then! Now, what is
it you want to tell me about the
book?

BROOKE
Hugh... I like you very much.

HUGH
I'm very happy to hear that. I
like you, too - and I want to get
to know you better.

BROOKE
You'll think I'm crazy. In fact,
I'm starting to wonder about that
myself. Maybe it's all in my
imagination!

HUGH
What are you talking about,
Brooke?

EXT. CASTLE DINER - DAY

Young Scrooge and Christmas Present arrive at the outside
of the diner.

YOUNG SCROOGE

He must be close by.

He takes a deep breath.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I smell food. And a lot of it.

They turn to see the diner.

INT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER - DAY

The boys and their anxious mothers sit in the front row.

SILVESTRI

Well! Thank you for waiting. After serious deliberation, I am happy to announce that the role of Tiny Tim will be played by Tiny Tim!

The mothers jump out of their seats and drag their sons toward the exit.

PHILLIP

That's not fair! He had a costume!

ANN

Let's go.

Silvestri turns to Tiny Tim.

SILVESTRI

The show is tonight at eight. Bring your parents for half price!

TINY TIM

My father and mother are still in Camden Town.

SILVESTRI

Of course, they are. Now, let me show you your blocking.

TINY TIM

My wot?

SILVESTRI

(to Mrs. Pippins)
My goodness, he's a natural!

INT. CASTLE DINER - DAY

The diners stop eating and cast uneasy glares at Young Scrooge and Christmas Present as they enter.

Brooke, facing the door, sees them.

BROOKE

Oh, no!

She grabs a menu and holds it to block her face.

HUGH

What's wrong!?

Fran approaches Young Scrooge and Christmas Present.

FRAN

(unfazed)

Sit anywhere. I'll be right with you.

And she's gone.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I smell sausages.

They take a seat at the counter.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I do not see Tiny Tim.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

No, but I see cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, cakes...

Fran returns to them.

FRAN

What's with the get-ups?

YOUNG SCROOGE

I beg your pardon?

FRAN

Coffee?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Please.

She tosses them two menus as she pours.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It all looks delightful.

BROOKE AND HUGH

Hugh watches Young Scrooge and Christmas Present.

HUGH

Brilliant! Look at those costumes!

Brooke remains behind her menu.

HUGH (CONT'D)

They must be in "A Christmas Carol."

Brooke peers over the top of her menu.

BROOKE

What do you know about it!?

HUGH

It's at the little theater here in town. The Mayor is attending the performance tonight.

BROOKE

They're not actors. In fact, they kinda belong to you.

HUGH

What?

BROOKE

Let's go.

His face lights up with absolute befuddlement as she drops money onto the table.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

My treat.

THE COUNTER

Fran grabs the pencil from her ear and a notebook from her apron.

FRAN

Shoot.

YOUNG SCROOGE

We are unarmed.

FRAN

What do you want to eat?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Oh. Would you, by chance, have
bubble and squeak?

FRAN

Look, sonny, no games. What do you
want?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Dare I ask if you have any
suckling pig?

FRAN

A comedian. If you want to get
into your roles, that's all well
and good -- just not on my time,
capeesh?

Young Scrooge reads the menu.

YOUNG SCROOGE

What is a hamburger with french
fries?

FRAN

Delicious. How do you want it
cooked?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Over a fire.

FRAN

Rare, medium, or well done?

YOUNG SCROOGE

I want it done, of course.

FRAN

How about you, Santa?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I am the Ghost of Christmas
Present!

FRAN

Sure ya are.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You have never seen the like of me
before!

FRAN

Honey, I used to work the
overnight shift. I've seen
everything. What do you want to
eat?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

The Hungry Man Special.

FRAN

How do you like your eggs?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

All mixed up.

FRAN

Scrambled.

Fran heads into the kitchen.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I had my mouth all set for a
roasted suckling.

Brooke and Hugh arrive behind them.

She tries to keep her angry voice down.

BROOKE

What are you two doing here!? I
told you to stay at home!

YOUNG SCROOGE

We couldn't!

BROOKE

How do you expect to pay for the
food you ordered!?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

He's got a few shillings.

BROOKE

They don't take shillings in
America!

HUGH

Who are these people?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I am the Ghost of --

BROOKE

Come on, we gotta go!

She "helps" by forcing off the stools.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

But the food!

BROOKE

You can have a baloney sandwich at home!

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

Brooke's and Hugh's cars are parked in the driveway.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (V.O.)

So this is a baloney sandwich!

YOUNG SCROOGE (V.O.)

With a blot of mustard.

INT. BROOKE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Young Scrooge and Christmas Present are at the kitchen table looking at their sandwiches. Brooke and a very dazed Hugh have coffee.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Puny little thing, isn't it?

BROOKE

I'm afraid it's the best I can do.

HUGH

Ah... I'm a bit confused.

Young Scrooge takes a cautious bite.

BROOKE

What about all that food you had when you first arrived here?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It's just for show.

Brooke smiles at him as he takes a bite.

HUGH

I'm not understanding any of this.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

(to Hugh)

My entrance in Stave Two. I always arrive on a mountain of food.

BROOKE

Why were you at the diner? You promised you wouldn't go out.

YOUNG SCROOGE

We had no choice. We were looking for Tiny Tim.

BROOKE

What do you mean "looking" for him!?

YOUNG SCROOGE

He's gone.

BROOKE

Gone where!?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

We don't know!

HUGH

Can someone please tell me what is going on?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

(to Hugh)
Tiny Tim is missing.

HUGH

Tiny Tim!?

BROOKE

That's the "Timothy" you spoke to on the phone.

HUGH

What are you talking about?

INT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER - DAY

Tiny Tim is dazed and confused as he writes in his script. Mrs. Pippins and Silvestri are thrilled.

SILVESTRI

-- and you say "God Bless Us Every One" to the house! And that's it!

TINY TIM

Wot house?

SILVESTRI

The audience. The audience is the house.

TINY TIM

That's daft.

SILVESTRI

Now, the performance starts at eight, so be back here tonight by six o'clock.

TINY TIM

All right. Do I get a costume?

SILVESTRI

Just... wear what you've got on.

EXT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER - DAY

The door opens, and out walks Tiny Tim, script in hand.

EXT. ANN'S PARKED CAR - DAY

Across the street, Ann and Phillip watch as Tiny Tim continues on his way.

PHILLIP

Can we go home?

ANN

We're going to follow him.

PHILLIP

All the way to Camden Town!?

EXT. ANOTHER STREET IN CASTLE HILL - DAY

Scrooge yells out with cupped hands as Belle follows.

SCROOGE

Tiny Tim! Hilli-ho, Tim!

People look out several windows at the commotion.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Tiny Tim! Where are you!?

BELLE

He's not here.

SCROOGE

He can't have just disappeared.

BELLE

We should return to the others.
Perhaps they have found him.

SCROOGE

I suppose that's possible.

Tiny Tim turns onto their street, happily walking along and carrying his crutch.

BELLE

Look! There he is!

SCROOGE

Tiny Tim!

TINY TIM

Mister Scrooge!

Scrooge and Belle run towards Tiny Tim, who runs to them as well. Behind him, a car turns onto the street and pulls over to the side.

INT. ANN'S CAR - DAY

Ann pulls over as she and Phillip watch the reunion.

ANN

I don't believe it!

They see Scrooge hoist Tiny Tim onto his shoulders.

PHILLIP

Look at those clothes! The whole family's nuts! Let's go home.

ANN

Not until I see where they live.

PHILLIP

Who cares?

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

Brooke's and Hugh's cars are parked in the driveway.

BROOKE (V.O.)

I can't find Belle or Mister Scrooge anywhere.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A stoic Hugh is seated on the sofa next to Christmas Present and Young Scrooge.

Brooke paces the room.

BROOKE

Who knows what trouble they could
be in!?

HUGH

Scrooge?

BROOKE

Yes -- and Belle, and Tiny Tim!

HUGH

(to Young Scrooge)
I thought you were Scrooge?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Indeed I am.

BROOKE

He's Scrooge when Scrooge was
younger.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Her favorite characters in the
book came to life. Favorite.
That's me, Sir. I must say I feel
a connection with the fair Brooke.

A perplexed Hugh turns to Brooke.

BROOKE

I liked him before he tossed away
his engagement to Belle!

YOUNG SCROOGE

Which makes me a free man,
darling.

BROOKE

Don't call me darling! Hugh,
I know how this looks, but you
have to believe me. They came from
the book!

HUGH

From my great-grandfather's book?

BROOKE

Yes. Remember the note that came with it? It said never to read it in one sitting...

HUGH

I remember. And you read it in one sitting.

BROOKE

Yes... but who knew!?

HUGH

He said the book was magic -- I didn't think he meant literally.

He reaches for the book on the coffee table and leafs through the pages.

HUGH (CONT'D)

You... came out of these pages?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Of course! It's our home!

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

Scrooge, Tiny Tim, and Belle walk up the driveway.

Across the street, Ann and Phillip watch from their car.

INT. ANN'S CAR - DAY

Ann and Phillip see Scrooge, Belle, and Tiny Tim enter the house.

ANN

No wonder that boy is looney. Look at his parents!

She dials her cell phone and waits.

ANN (CONT'D)

Yes, can you connect me with Child Services, please?

She turns to Phillip.

ANN (CONT'D)

Break out the crutch, Phillip, you're going on tonight as Tiny Tim!

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A stunned Hugh stands next to Brooke as she faces her literary visitors.

BROOKE

All of you could have been in serious trouble!

SCROOGE

There's nothing to worry your mind about, my dear. Everything worked out just fine.

Brooke smiles at Scrooge. Her lip quivers as her face changes to a heavy expression.

She sits down and holds her composure.

HUGH

What is it, Brooke?

BROOKE

I'm all right. I just need to catch my breath and regroup.

BELLE

Something is wrong.

BROOKE

I never should have taken out that second mortgage.

YOUNG SCROOGE

You can do two mortgages now!? How exciting!

HUGH

Brooke?

BROOKE

The bank is going to foreclose on my house.

HUGH

Oh, Brooke...

BROOKE

Mister Travis delivered the notice personally. Happy New Year.

HUGH

Joe Travis at Castle Hill Savings and Loan?

BROOKE
Yes. A real Scrooge.
(to Scrooge)
Sorry.

SCROOGE
No offense taken.

HUGH
How far are you behind?

BROOKE
One payment. I never missed one
before. They're closing my store,
too.

HUGH
I'm so sorry.

BROOKE
Excuse me. I just need some time
to think.

Fighting back tears, Brooke exits.

TINY TIM
Poor Brooke.

SCROOGE
Mister Travis is a bit of a
Scrooge, is he?

HUGH
That's what I hear.

Scrooge arches an eyebrow as a thin, curled smile appears
on his lips.

SCROOGE
He doesn't even know the meaning
of the word.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Brooke leans against a tree, lost in thought. Hugh exits
out the back door and approaches her.

HUGH
You've had quite a day.

BROOKE

Just yesterday I was thinking that I wouldn't care if I lost the store. I'd be forced to do something else. Leaving on my own is one thing. Being kicked out is another.

HUGH

I can understand that.

BROOKE

It was my father's. I used to love it... but it's not the same without him. I remember in grade school I would sit on his lap behind the front counter and he would read from "The Wonderful Wizard of OZ," and "Pollyanna." I still turn corners expecting to see him shelving books, closing out the register -- but no one's ever there.

HUGH

He's still there in spirit, isn't he?

She gives a slight nod in agreement.

He draws closer to her.

HUGH (CONT'D)

You know a lot about old books. It's in your blood. I'm not convinced you want to give it up. Things will get better...

Brooke leans toward him as if under a spell.

HUGH (CONT'D)

They always do...

Their lips grow closer... and closer as their eyes close.

SCROOGE

Am I interrupting?

A beat.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Sorry. I need Mister Chatwin's help.

HUGH
How can I help?

SCROOGE
Might I borrow your horseless
carriage?

HUGH
You don't know how to drive, do
you?

SCROOGE
Perhaps you could? It's important.
(to Brooke)
Could you spare him for an hour's
time?

BROOKE
Of course.

EXT. HUGH'S CAR - DAY

Hugh drives along a road in Castle Hill, with Scrooge in
the passenger seat.

SCROOGE (V.O.)
So you're Binny's great-grandson.

HUGH (V.O.)
Yes, Sir.

SCROOGE (V.O.)
Good old Binny. Spent many a
Christmas at his home. A real
penny pincher. I liked him.

INT. HUGH'S CAR - DAY

A serious Hugh stares straight ahead in silence. Scrooge
notices this.

SCROOGE
Is something wrong?

HUGH
No, no. It's just rather strange
that you knew Great-grandfather
Binny better than I did. I only
met him once. I was six.

SCROOGE

Strange indeed. If it means anything to ye, he didn't much like children. He was a bit of a humbug.

GPS VOICE

Turn left in one-half mile.

SCROOGE

What is that thing, anyway?

HUGH

It's a Global Positioning System.

SCROOGE

A what?

HUGH

We call it a GPS. When you get into a car, you push this little button, and it asks where you want to go, and it tells you the directions.

SCROOGE

Huh! A modern marvel.

EXT. SAVINGS AND LOAN PARKING LOT

Hugh pulls into the lot and parks. Scrooge exits the car.

SCROOGE

Wait here for me. Shan't be long.

INT. BANK PRESIDENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Joe Travis sits behind his desk.

A cane RAPS on his door.

JOE

Yes?

He looks up to see Scrooge standing in the doorframe, cane in hand.

He has changed. His face is stern, an eyebrow is arched, his eyes are narrowed, and his mouth is in a frown.

The Scrooge everyone knows.

JOE (CONT'D)

Can I... can I help you?

Scrooge doesn't respond.

JOE (CONT'D)

I asked if I could help you?

SCROOGE

I heard ya.

JOE

Well?

SCROOGE

It's customary to invite one in
and to have a seat... at least
with civilized people. Is it not?

JOE

Won't you come in? Have a seat.

Scrooge enters and takes a chair.

SCROOGE

Your manners leave something to be
desired, Sir.

JOE

I'm sorry--

SCROOGE

Indeed, you are.

JOE

Do I know you?

SCROOGE

I am Ebenezer Scrooge, Sir, of
Scrooge and Marley's. London.

JOE

What!? Is this some kind of a
joke?

SCROOGE

You are acquainted with a friend
of mine, Sir, and you have not
treated her with the milk of human
kindness.

JOE

You're not being very specific,
Mister Scrooge.

SCROOGE

What else can I be when I live in
such a world of fools as this?
When a squeezing, wrenching,
grasping, scraping, clutching,
covetous, old skinflint like
yourself can cause such grief at
Christmas!

JOE

Please state your business or
leave. I am a very busy man.

SCROOGE

Look at that blotch on your coat!
Is it an undigested bit of beef, a
blot of mustard, a crumb of
cheese, a fragment of an underdone
potato?

JOE

I had Italian for lunch. It's
going to the cleaners in the
morning!

SCROOGE

Heed my words.

JOE

I'm listening.

SCROOGE

You will not foreclose on Miss
Brooke Copley's Copley's Books.

JOE

She missed her payment. The store
closes.

SCROOGE

I give you one more chance. Recall
the foreclosure.

JOE

No. Impossible.

Scrooge leans forward in his chair and speaks in his most
menacing voice.

SCROOGE

Hear me. Tonight, you will be
visited by a spirit.

JOE
What!?

SCROOGE
When the bell tolls one.

JOE
What spirit!? What are you talking
about!?

SCROOGE
Heed me. You had your chance. You
will rue with your very soul what
is in store for you tonight.

Scrooge walks to the door and turns back to Joe.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)
When the bell tolls... one.

JOE
That won't do any good.

SCROOGE
What do you mean?

JOE
I'm in bed every night at eight-
thirty, and I take a sleeping
pill.

A beat.

SCROOGE
He'll be there at nine.

And he's gone, leaving behind a nervous and confused Joe.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

Christmas Present, script in hand, is in the front yard
with Tiny Tim, who is "acting."

TINY TIM
Peter! You should see the
Christmas Pudding! God Bless Us,
Every One!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
I would not put the emphasis on
"Every." I would put it on "Us."

TINY TIM

But that's the way I always say
it.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

In real life, but this is for the
theater! You need to be bigger
than life.

TINY TIM

God Bless *Us*, Every One!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Much better!

Hugh and Scrooge pull into the driveway.

TINY TIM

God Bless *Us*, Every One! God Bless
Us Every *One*!

Scrooge hurries toward them.

SCROOGE

Christmas Present, I need a word
with you.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Of course, Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Excuse us, please, Tiny Tim.

TINY TIM

Sure thing, Guv'nor.

Tiny Tim heads for the backyard.

Hugh enters the house.

SCROOGE

I need your ethereal assistance.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Anything, Scrooge.

SCROOGE

I paid a visit to the banker who
plans to evict Brooke and told him
that he will be visited by a
spirit tonight.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Me?

SCROOGE

You're the only spirit in the vicinity.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Yes, but--

SCROOGE

You need to scare him so he will drop the eviction.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

But it is the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come who scares people. I'm the jolly one.

SCROOGE

Not tonight.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

But we don't know where he lives.

SCROOGE

I have his name. All we need to do is use something called a telephone book.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

A what?

SCROOGE

Binny had one. I saw him use it.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Does Brooke have one?

SCROOGE

It's in the kitchen.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

What happens after you find his address?

SCROOGE

We borrow Hugh's car and use something called a PSG... or was it a SGP...

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

SGP?

SCROOGE

A modern marvel. Now listen -- here's what we do...

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hugh enters. Belle stands at the fireplace.

HUGH
I'm looking for Brooke?

BELLE
I thought you had left.

HUGH
I just got back. Have you seen her?

BELLE
Is she your intended?

HUGH
I beg your pardon?

BELLE
Is she your intended?

HUGH
I'm very fond of her. Very much indeed. A special lady.

BELLE
I am?

HUGH
No, Brooke.

BELLE
What's wrong with me?

HUGH
Nothing --

BELLE
I'm young, vivacious, and I have released my intended.

She moves closer to Hugh.

BELLE (CONT'D)
You're so handsome.

Hugh backs up slightly. She follows.

HUGH
Thank you.

BELLE

We could be happy together. I can tell.

HUGH

But... you live in a book.

BELLE

Stave Two. Early pages.

HUGH

Stave?

BELLE

Stave is another word for staff. As in a music staff.

HUGH

Uh-huh...

BELLE

Our book is called "A Christmas Carol" and Mr. Dickens treated it as if it were a song. A stave, or staff, introduced a new section of that song.

HUGH

Oh.

BELLE

It sounds ever so much nicer than "chapter," don't you think?

HUGH

I suppose.

BELLE

We could be happy!

HUGH

Living in a book?

HUGH (CONT'D)

You're not... real.

Belle kisses him on the cheek.

BELLE

No?

YOUNG SCROOGE (O.S.)

So!

Belle and Hugh turn to see Young Scrooge enter the room.

YOUNG SCROOGE (CONT'D)
This is the even-handed dealing of
the world!

HUGH
Now, hold on a minute!

BELLE
What choice did I have? You only
want your golden idol. Do not
preach to me of love!

HUGH
I had nothing to do with this.

She hurries out of the room.

YOUNG SCROOGE
Have you no sense of honor?

HUGH
Okay, let's suppose you were real--

YOUNG SCROOGE
Of course, I'm real, you poltroon!

HUGH
So why did you let her go?

YOUNG SCROOGE
Because I spend all my time at my
business.

This strikes a chord in Hugh.

YOUNG SCROOGE (CONT'D)
And you can't have both. But that
doesn't mean I should stand by and
watch her kissing someone else.

He storms out of the room.

Hugh remains in thought until he hears a DOOR OPEN and
CLOSE in the kitchen.

INT. BROOKE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Hugh enters to find Brooke as she puts a tea kettle on
the burner.

HUGH

Here you are!

BROOKE

I was just getting some air.

HUGH

Ah.

BROOKE

Have you called your office? They must be wondering where you are.

HUGH

I'm not worried about that. I'm concerned about you losing your business.

BROOKE

Thank you... But I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel.

HUGH

We'll think of something.

BROOKE

We?

HUGH

Over dinner? Tonight?

Brooke manages a smile.

BROOKE

That would be... lovely...

Tiny Tim appears at the entrance.

TINY TIM

Excuse me, Miss?

They turn to see Tiny Tim.

BROOKE

Yes?

TINY TIM

I've got a little bit of a problem.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - THE BACKYARD - DAY

Scrooge and Christmas Present are deep in conversation.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

How do I get inside?

SCROOGE

Can't you walk through the wall?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I use my staff for all that.

SCROOGE

So use it!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It only works in the book. See?

He waves the staff in a majestic arc as silver sparkles burst out of the cup.

Christmas Present is astonished.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (CONT'D)

What do you know! The thing works!

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Brooke is in a heated discussion with MISS RATHBONE, 50s, a bespectacled, pencil-thin, humorless Social Worker.

A STATE OFFICER waits at the living room entrance, as Belle, Young Scrooge, and Hugh watch.

BROOKE

Miss Rathbone, you can't take him!

RATHBONE

The state says otherwise, Miss Copley. He is a child living in an unstable environment.

BROOKE

There is nothing unstable about my home!

BELLE

Indeed!

RATHBONE

And who might you be?

BELLE

I am Belle.

YOUNG SCROOGE

And I am Young Ebenezer Scrooge,
late apprentice at Fezziwig's
Warehouse, now under my own
employ.

BROOKE

(under her breath)
You're not helping.

RATHBONE

Ebenezer Scrooge? I thought you
were old and mean?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Not in Stave Two.

RATHBONE

Miss Copley. I am going to see
that you and your group of little
friends are fully investigated.

BROOKE

On what grounds?

RATHBONE

You are all delusional. The boy
comes with me to the State Home.

HUGH

Just a moment. I happen to work
for the Mayor.

RATHBONE

In what capacity?

HUGH

Public Relations.

RATHBONE

When you work for Social Services,
I'll listen to what you have to
say.

HUGH

Of all the --

BROOKE

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve!

TINY TIM

If you take me there, I won't be
able to go back into the book!

RATHBONE
What book?

TINY TIM
"A Christmas Carol!"

RATHBONE
What's your name?

TINY TIM
Tiny Tim.

RATHBONE
Your real name?

TINY TIM
Timothy Cratchit.

RATHBONE
Right.

She guides him to the State Officer.

INT. ANN'S CAR - DAY

Ann and Phillip watch the Social Worker put Tim in the back seat of his car.

ANN
And there goes Timothy Cratchit.

She dials her phone.

ANN (CONT'D)
Hello, Mister Silvestri? Have you heard the news about that Tiny Tim boy?

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Scrooge and Christmas Present have joined the group.

BELLE
Poor Tiny Tim.

HUGH
He'll be all right.

BROOKE
What happens if he's not back in the book tomorrow?

SCROOGE

I don't know. It's never happened before.

BROOKE

Hugh? What about the Mayor?

HUGH

Everything has to go through channels with him -- and it won't happen by tomorrow night.

(puts his cell away)

The home is on Olson Street.

The room is filled with silence and despair.

BROOKE

(an idea)

Wait a minute...

HUGH

What!?

BROOKE

It just might work.

SCROOGE

It will! It will! What might work?

BROOKE

A plan to get Tiny Tim back.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

(to Belle)

How do you think you would look in something a bit more modern?

BELLE

(confused)

Hmm?

EXT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

The poster outside has "TONITE" plastered across the center. The sound of a small orchestra from inside plays "GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN."

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Phillip is in front of a mirror in his Tiny Tim costume as Ann combs his hair.

Actor Scrooge and Actor Bob Cratchit fuss at the mirror.

ANN

Buckle your knickers, Phillip.

ACTOR SCROOGE

This is the men's dressing room.

ANN

My son is Tiny Tim. He is the star of this play!

ACTOR SCROOGE

I am the star. Tiny Tim is a glorified bit player and this is still the men's dressing room!

ANN

My son needs me.

PHILLIP

(nonchalant)

No, I don't.

Ann arches an eyebrow.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

Yes, I do.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Young Scrooge has changed clothes with Hugh.

As Hugh adjusts the collar, Scrooge deftly lifts the car keys from the coat pocket.

Outside, Christmas Present watches through the window.

HUGH

This is quite constricting.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I must say yours is rather comfortable.

Brooke enters as Scrooge sneaks out of the room.

BROOKE

Are you ready for this?

YOUNG SCROOGE

By all means.

BROOKE

Belle...

Belle enters, totally transformed in an elegant V-neck, slim pencil business dress and a modern hairstyle.

The men are stunned.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Belle!?

HUGH

It can't be!

BELLE

I feel absolutely exposed!

(to Brooke)

How can you walk around in public like this!?

BROOKE

Are you sure you can do this?

BELLE

Yes. The well-being of the book hangs in the balance.

HUGH

Brooke, it might be better if we go.

BROOKE

We'd eventually be recognized as the imposters. Belle and Young Scrooge will be back in the book on Christmas Eve.

YOUNG SCROOGE

She's right.

BROOKE

There's nothing to worry about.

(to Belle)

Do you remember what to do?

BELLE

Yes.

HUGH

We should get going!

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - NIGHT

Brooke, Hugh, Belle and Young Scrooge exit the house and face the driveway.

HUGH

Wait!

Everyone stops.

Only Brooke's car remains in the driveway.

HUGH (CONT'D)

My car! Where's my car!?

BROOKE

Someone stole your car!?

HUGH

The keys were in my pocket! I always keep them in the right coat pocket!

Young Scrooge reaches into the pocket.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Nothing.

Brooke looks around.

BROOKE

Has anyone seen Mister Scrooge or the Ghost?

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Hugh's car SCREECHES onto the street at high speed, flies onto the sidewalk, misses a tree by inches, and takes out two mailboxes.

The tall staff of Christmas Present protrudes from the open sunroof.

INT. HUGH'S CAR - NIGHT

Scrooge is behind the wheel as they bounce and jolt.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I say, for someone who has never driven before, you're doing quite well!

GPS VOICE
Turn left onto Jones Street.

SCROOGE
Left!?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Right!

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

The car makes a sudden right turn with the SCREECH of the tires! It CRASHES through shrubs and continues over a lawn onto another street.

INT. HUGH'S CAR - NIGHT

They continue to bounce into the roof and the side doors.

GPS VOICE
Recalculating.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Hugh's car drives over another mailbox and skids to a stop outside a large home.

GPS VOICE
Arriving at destination.

Scrooge and Christmas Present stumble out of the car.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
I take back what I said. You are a terrible driver.

SCROOGE
I got us here, didn't I?

Christmas Present removes the staff from the sunroof.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)
You remember what to do?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Yes. I hope this still works.

Christmas Present waves the staff in a majestic arc. Sparkles shoot out from the cup.

He vanishes.

Scrooge is alone with the cold wind and falling snow.

SCROOGE

Snow! Humbug!

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Christmas Present's hearty LAUGHTER precedes him as he materializes, and finds himself in a shower with lots of spouts and levers.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Gadzooks! What is this place!?

Christmas Present presses his hand on the frosted glass door. He tries to open it but can't find a handle.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (CONT'D)

How do you... get out...

INT. JOE TRAVIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A digital alarm clock reads eight fifty-nine. Joe Travis is asleep in bed.

The alarm clock changes to nine.

A loud digital BEEP, BEEP, BEEP blasts through the room.

Joe sits upright with a start and shuts the alarm off.

He listens. Not a sound.

JOE

Humph! I knew it was a joke.

He hears the banging and the squeaking of pipes; followed by distant BURST of RUNNING WATER.

The SCREAM of Christmas Present BOOMS through the house.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

AHHHHHHHHHHH!

Joe is terrified.

EXT. JOE TRAVIS'S LAWN - NIGHT

Scrooge hears the muffled scream inside.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (O.S.)

AHHHHHHHHHH!

SCROOGE

That's it! Scare him good!

INT. JOE TRAVIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe quakes with fear as he hears the GHOSTLY LAUGHTER of Christmas Present.

Christmas Present materializes in front of his bed.

JOE

No! No! Go away!

Christmas Present is soaking wet. His hair droops down over his face, which gives him a menacing appearance.

JOE (CONT'D)

Who are you!?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I am the Ghost of Christmas Present! You have never seen the like of me before!

JOE

Why are you all wet?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Because... I came from the sea!

JOE

What were you doing there?

Christmas Present pours on the mean and scary act.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

This is about you, Joe Travis! Not me!

JOE

(quivering)
Why are you here!?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

To save your soul.

JOE

My soul!?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You are a wicked, greedy little man. Hear what I have to say.

JOE

I will! I will!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Look here!

Christmas Present's robe parts. He has no body.

Joe stares, horrified, as two frightful, wolfish children appear in the robe's shadow.

JOE

What - who are they?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

They are yours.

JOE

Mine? I don't even have kids!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You have many. They live in homes that you control with your greedy enterprise.

JOE

I'm just a banker...

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You are ever so much more. These children cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Unless his home is saved.

JOE

Where's his home?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Copley's Books!

JOE

He lives at Copley's Books?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

No -- not quite! Indirectly!

He thinks fast.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (CONT'D)

He is dependent on it! Deny it!
Slander those who tell it ye!
Admit it for your factious
purposes, and make it worse. And
bide the end!

Joe shakes with fear.

JOE

I will!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Heed my words, Banker. If you do
not... woe is you.

Joe, terrified, watches as the Boy and Girl fade back
into the blackness as the robe closes.

Christmas Present waves his staff in a majestic arc.

Nothing happens.

He tries a second time.

Nothing.

He raps it on the floor several times, waves it, the
sparkles fly from the cup.

He disappears with a POP.

EXT. JOE TRAVIS'S LAWN - NIGHT

As Scrooge paces with a constant eye on the house,
Christmas Present's voice echoes from nowhere.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (V.O.)

Come on, just a few more feet! You
can do it! Good old staff!

He materializes in front of Scrooge.

SCROOGE

How did it go in there?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

This thing is running out of
juice!

SCROOGE

Mission accomplished?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Indeed!

SCROOGE

Let's go!

Scrooge leads the way as they hurry back to the car.

EXT. CASTLE HILL STATE HOME - NIGHT

Brooke pulls up and parks in front of an ominous
Victorian home.

Everyone exits the car.

HUGH

Final check?

YOUNG SCROOGE

I am Doctor Clinton James.

BELLE

And I am Doctor Veronica O'Hara.

HUGH

And you're from?

INT. CASTLE HILL HALLWAY AT STATE HOME - NIGHT

Young Scrooge and Belle, in the dingy hallway.

They speak with NURSE CRANFORD, 40s, professional and
tough, a match for anyone.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Must I repeat myself again? We are
from the main headquarters in
Boston.

NURSE CRANFORD

It's just so unusual for a boy to
be removed at this time of night.

BELLE

This boy could be particularly dangerous, Nurse...?

NURSE CRANFORD

Cranford. How so dangerous?

BELLE

You heard of where he was found?

NURSE CRANFORD

With a bunch of nuts who thought they were Christmas Carol characters.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Nuts?

BELLE

I heard one of them, the female, was actually quite nice.

NURSE CRANFORD

Sure, running around in a hoop skirt and convincing some poor kid he's Tiny Tim.

Belle grows very angry.

YOUNG SCROOGE

And young Tiny Tim is rumored to be the worst of them all. We are taking him to a Maximum Security facility tonight.

NURSE CRANFORD

Wait here.

She moves quickly down the hall and into another room.

BELLE

Nuts? Is this what they think of us!?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Just keep your temper under control. Please.

Belle scans the area.

BELLE

So this is the modern day equivalent of the workhouse?

EXT. CASTLE HILL STATE HOME - NIGHT

An anxious Hugh looks at the watch.

BROOKE

They should be coming out any moment now.

HUGH

Assuming there are no complications.

BROOKE

Have faith.

HUGH

I'll get fired if I get caught doing this.

BROOKE

I think you're wonderful.

HUGH

(a smile)
Do you?

INT. CASTLE HILL HALLWAY AT STATE HOME - NIGHT

Tiny Tim appears in the hallway and approaches with Nurse Cranford. His face lights up.

Young Scrooge speaks over Tiny Tim as the boy is about to cry out.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Ah yes! There he is! Tim, I am Doctor O'Hara, and this is Doctor James. We are here to take you to a new facility.

Tiny Tim catches on.

TINY TIM

Very well. Where?

BELLE

Don't ask so many questions. Let's go.

They head for the door.

NURSE CRANFORD

Would you like a straitjacket?
Just in case?

BELLE

We have one in the car. Goodnight.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Thank you.

TINY TIM

Ta!

They are out the door and gone.

NURSE CRANFORD

I thought she was O'Hara, and he
was James!

She rushes to the front door in time to see Brooke's car
speed away.

NURSE CRANFORD (CONT'D)

That's not a state vehicle!

She takes out her cell and dials.

NURSE CRANFORD (CONT'D)

Hello, police? A boy has just been
taken from Castle Hill State
Home... His name is Tiny Tim. No,
this isn't a prank!

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

The glow of the radio lights the dark as a dispatch voice
comes out of the speaker as TWO OFFICERS stare at it in
disbelief.

POLICE DISPATCHER (V.O.)

All units, be on the lookout for a
woman and man with a small boy
dressed up like Tiny Tim... Yeah,
that's what it says. Be alert as
the child is dangerous from a
suspicious family that dress like
Dickens characters. They are in
the company of imposters going by
the names of Doctors O'Hara, a
female, and James, male. They
should be considered potentially
dangerous. Over and out.

EXT. CASTLE ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

Phillip is near the side door of the building, sitting on a step. Ann comes out the door.

ANN

What are you doing out here in the cold!?

PHILLIP

It's stuffy. Just taking a break.

ANN

You'll miss your cue.

PHILLIP

I don't go on for a half hour.

Mrs. Pippins joins them. She is dressed in a tall, blonde wig, mourning dress, and pounds of makeup on her face.

MRS. PIPPINS

Ah! There you are, Tiny Tim! You were wonderful in your scene.

PHILLIP

Thank you, Mrs. Pippins. You were good, too.

MRS. PIPPINS

Do you think I looked youthful? On stage?

Phillip and Ann exchange a glance.

ANN

Yes! Of course!

The double WHOOP WHOOP of a police siren and the sudden flicker of blue and white lights shocks them!

MRS. PIPPINS

The police! Something's wrong!

ANN

Mrs. Pippins, calm down.

Two POLICE OFFICERS approach them.

OFFICER 1

'Evening.

MRS. PIPPINS

Good evening, officers.

OFFICER 2

And who are you supposed to be?

MRS. PIPPINS

Oh! I am Belle, Scrooge's intended.

OFFICER 1

And you, sonny?

PHILLIP

Tiny Tim. You probably don't recognize me without my crutch.

OFFICER 1

And you must be Doctor O'Hara.

ANN

Who!?

The Officers steer them towards the cruiser as they cuff Ann and Mrs. Pippins.

ANN (CONT'D)

What!? What is this!?

MRS. PIPPINS

But we have a performance!

PHILLIP

I haven't said, "God bless us --

OFFICER 2

Save it for the Sergeant.

They are loaded into the car.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - NIGHT

Brooke's car pulls in. Everyone piles out quickly.

BROOKE

Get inside! Hurry!

Hugh's car SCREECHES toward them.

HUGH

My car!

He watches as the car SMASHES into more mailboxes.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Oh, no! No!

The car SKIDS into Brooke's driveway. Scrooge and Christmas Present hop out.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Oh, dear! I thought I was going to die!

SCROOGE

You're a ghost!

Everyone stares.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Merry Christmas!

TINY TIM

Mister Scrooge!

Tim hugs him.

SCROOGE

You're free?

TINY TIM

I was rescued!

HUGH

You stole my car!?

SCROOGE

Unavoidable. But worthwhile.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

The driveway is empty. Tim watches from the window.

SUPER: DEC. 24th.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Everyone waits. Brooke enters with the book.

BROOKE

Any sign of them?

TINY TIM

Nothing yet.

SCROOGE

Ah, the book. It's Christmas Eve. Time to return.

TINY TIM

Hugh's back!

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

Hugh pulls into the driveway.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hugh enters, dejected.

BROOKE

What's wrong?

HUGH

I've been sacked.

BROOKE

What!?

HUGH

The Mayor attended the play. Big commotion. Three people were arrested.

BROOKE

Arrested? Why?

HUGH

For being dangerous criminals dressed as characters from "A Christmas Carol."

YOUNG SCROOGE

Imposters!

HUGH

Actors. They proved they were at the show. But I wasn't there and the Mayor had to face the press.

TINY TIM

And you lost your job?

HUGH

I'll be all right.

Tiny Tim points out the window.

TINY TIM

Police car!

The characters gather near the book.

SCROOGE
Delightful visit.

BROOKE
I'll see you next year.

SCROOGE
Only if you read the book in one sitting.

BROOKE
Goodbye, Belle.

BELLE
Brooke. Thank you. And you need to buy longer dresses.

BELLE (CONT'D)
Farewell, Hugh.

Belle kisses Hugh -- a moment longer than she should.

Brooke notices.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Don't forget me!

He hugs Brooke.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT (CONT'D)
Meeting you has been a true pleasure. And that sandwich baloney. Loved it.

Young Scrooge offers his hand for a shake. Brooke hugs him instead and kisses his cheek.

YOUNG SCROOGE
I knew it!

Brooke arches an eyebrow as her lip curls into a smirk.

YOUNG SCROOGE (CONT'D)
Maybe not.

TINY TIM
Goodbye, Miss! Tell them I can play Tiny Tim next year!

BROOKE
I will.

She bends down to hug Tim, but he kisses her cheek.
Hugh hurries to the window.

HUGH
They're getting out of their car.

SCROOGE
Everyone ready?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT
Yes. Ready.

EXT. BROOKE'S HOME - DAY

Two POLICE OFFICERS ring the bell.

Nothing.

They ring it again.

Brooke opens the door and greets them with a smile.

A bright blue glow momentarily appears behind her.

OFFICER 1
Good morning, Ma'am. Social
Services took a boy from this
address yesterday. He escaped last
night, and we have reason to
believe he may have returned here.

BROOKE
A boy? Here? I live alone,
Officer.

OFFICER 1
May we check? We could get a
warrant, but we've been up all
night with this.

OFFICER 2
We just want to go home. It's
Christmas Eve.

BROOKE
Please! Come in. There's no one
here.

The Police Officers enter the house.

INT. BROOKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hugh stares at the book.

A blue glow flickers over it and soon dissipates.

Brooke enters with the Officers.

BROOKE
Officers, this is my friend, Hugh
Chatwin -- he just arrived.

OFFICER 1
Sir.

HUGH
Is something wrong?

BROOKE
They're looking for a boy, I
think?

HUGH
Here?

BROOKE
Search away, Officers!

The Officers leave the room.

Hugh motions to the book and signals they got away.

The doorbell RINGS. Brooke hurries out of the room.

INT. THE FRONT DOOR - DAY

Brooke opens the door.

Joe Travis stands before her, looking like he hasn't
slept all night.

He wears a coat over his pajamas.

BROOKE
Mister Travis!

JOE
Miss Copley. I wanted to see you
personally --

BROOKE
You've already made yourself
clear, Mister Tra --

JOE
-- to apologize.

BROOKE
What?

JOE
Miss Copley, I'm sorry. I should
have been more understanding...
and I will be, I promise. Your
father was a very good customer
for many years. I'm somewhat
ashamed of myself.

BROOKE
Mister Travis...

JOE
A Merry Christmas to you, Brooke!

BROOKE
I --

JOE
Come to my office the day after
Christmas and we'll discuss your
affairs over steaming cups of
smoking hot cocoa!

Joe kisses her on the cheek.

JOE (CONT'D)
Everything will be all right!

Brooke is speechless as he hurries away.

JOE (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!

The Officers arrive at the door.

OFFICER 1
Nothing here. Sorry for bothering
you.

BROOKE
Anything for the law, gentlemen!

OFFICER 1
Merry Christmas.

BROOKE
Merry Christmas!

The Police Officers leave.

Brooke closes the door.

She turns to see Hugh.

HUGH
(with a sad smile)
They're back in the book.

With slight hesitation, she lifts the book and opens it to the first page and the inscription.

HUGH (CONT'D)
I don't know if they were truly real -- or not. But I'm going to miss them.

BROOKE
What about your job? Will you stay in Castle Hill?

HUGH
Actually, I had an idea. It might solve both our problems.

BROOKE
What!?

She returns the book to the coffee table.

HUGH
I was thinking about my e-books.

BROOKE
Hugh, there's no such thing as an antique e-book.

HUGH
I buy my e-books online. What about Copley's Books -- online!

BROOKE
Online?

HUGH
A Copley's Antique Books website. It will compliment the store and you'll get orders from around the world!

BROOKE
I don't know anything about setting up an online store.

HUGH

I do. And seeing as how I'm out of a job at the moment...

Her eyes light up.

BROOKE

You?

HUGH

Of course, I'll buy into the business. I'm sure that will help with whatever arrangement Mister Travis comes up with.

BROOKE

But, Hugh --

Hugh shows a sly smile.

HUGH

Great-grandfather Binny didn't just leave me the book.

Hugh takes Brooke's hands in his.

Their voices grow soft as they inch closer together.

BROOKE

Do you think you'd like working here... with me?

HUGH

No.

BROOKE

No?

HUGH

I think I would love it. Merry Christmas, Miss Copley.

BROOKE

Merry Christmas, Mister Chatwin.

And finally, they kiss... a long, loving kiss.

The book is seen on the table.

SCROOGE (V.O.)

And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!

FADE OUT.