

CHESTNUTS ROASTED

A Seasonal Selection of Shorts, Sketches, and Spoofs

By Dean O'Carroll

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A Seasonal Selection of Shorts, Sketches, and Spoofs

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SYNOPSIS: A collection of five holiday-themed comedies, which could be performed individually, or all together as a complete evening. THE HOLIDAY DESSERT DRAFT depicts the moments when every holiday selected its classic dessert, including Christmas's odd choice of fruitcake and candy canes. A CHRISTMAS CAROL CAROL finds Charles Dickens visited by a ghostly figure who warns him that his latest book will be adapted in some strange ways in the future. 2020 HINDSIGHT—A STORIED CHRISTMAS is a parody of a holiday classic where a narrator looks back on that fabled year of 2020 when he had to Skype with Santa and all he wanted was a copy of Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven for Christmas. THE BIG SLEIGH is a film noir riff where former sleigh-puller Dash the reindeer is now a private eye, hired by Mrs. Claus to find Santa's missing sleigh. And MERRY HAN-KWAN-CHRIS-STICE, CARLY GREEN is a parody of everyone's favorite animated special about that loveable cube-noggin, Carly Green, who agrees to direct her friends' holiday show in hopes of recovering her holiday spirit.

DURATION: 90 minutes.

TIME: Present.

CAST OF CHARACTERS: 6-19 females, 6-32 males, 0-29 either

THE HOLIDAY DESSERT DRAFT

(12 either)

COMMENTATOR 1 (m/f)	<i>(28 lines)</i>
COMMENTATOR 2 (m/f)	<i>(20 lines)</i>
BIRTHDAYS (m/f).....	<i>(3 lines)</i>
THANKSGIVING (m/f).....	<i>(1 line)</i>
CHRISTMAS (m/f).....	<i>(13 lines)</i>
HALLOWEEN (m/f)	<i>(2 lines)</i>
VALENTINE'S DAY (m/f).....	<i>(2 lines)</i>
HANUKKAH (m/f)	<i>(2 lines)</i>
EASTER (m/f)	<i>(2 lines)</i>
INDEPENDENCE DAY (m/f)	<i>(2 lines)</i>

PURIM (m/f).....	(2 lines)
ROSH HASHANAH (m/f)	(2 lines)

A CHRISTMAS CAROL CAROL

(6-8 females, 6-21 males, 0-12 either)

CHARLES DICKENS (m)	(33 lines)
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THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

CAROLS YET TO COME/CAROL (f).....	(38 lines)
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ENSEMBLE CAST: (5-7 females, 5-20 males, 0-12 either)

(Flexible, doubling is highly encouraged.)

FIRST GENTLEMAN (m).....	(1 line)
SCROOGE 1 (m).....	(2 lines)
SECOND GENTLEMAN (m).....	(1 line)
SCROOGE 2 (m).....	(3 lines)
CRATCHIT 1 (m)	(2 lines)
SCROOGE 3 (m).....	(2 lines)
ACTOR 1 (m/f)	(Non-Speaking)
MARLEY (m).....	(1 line)
SCROOGE 4 (m).....	(2 lines)
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST (f)	Role requires singing. (3 lines)
TINY TIM 1 (m).....	(Non-Speaking)
LUCY SCROOGE CARDO (f).....	(3 lines)
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT (m)	(3 lines)
CRATCHIT 2 (m)	(2 lines)
MRS. CRATCHIT 1 (f).....	(3 lines)
TINY TIM 2 (m).....	(2 lines)
MRS. CRATCHIT 2 (f).....	(2 lines)
TINY TIM 3 (m).....	(2 lines)
CRATCHIT 3 (m)	(4 lines)
SCROOGE 5 (m).....	(4 lines)
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME (m/f)	(Non-Speaking)
SCROOGE 6A* (m).....	(6 lines)
CRATCHIT 4A* (m).....	(2 lines)

ACTOR 2 (m/f)	(2 lines)
TINY TIM 4A* (m).....	(3 lines)
SCROOGE 6B** (m)	(6 lines)
CRATCHIT 4B** (m).....	(1 line)
TINY TIM 4B** (f).....	(3 lines)
BETH (f).....	(1 line)
ACTOR 3 (m/f)	(1 line)
ACTOR 4 (m/f)	(1 line)
ACTOR 5 (m/f)	(1 line)
ACTOR 6 (m/f)	(1 line)
TINA (f).....	(4 lines)
ACTOR 7 (m/f)	(1 line)
ACTOR 8 (m/f)	(1 line)
ACTOR 9 (m/f)	(1 line)
ACTOR 10 (m/f)	(1 line)
MAD SCIENTIST (m/f).....	(2 lines)

*Appears only in the “Community” version of the play

**Appears only in the “School” version of the play

2020 HINDSIGHT: A STORIED CHRISTMAS

(1 female, 4 males, 5 either)

NARRATOR (m/f)	(28 lines)
MUSIC TEACHER (m/f)	(5 lines)
RAFFI HARKER (m/f).....	(24 lines)
MARS “RED” RYDER (m).....	(3 lines)
MOTHER (f).....	(14 lines)
FATHER (m)	(9 lines)
SLICK (m/f).....	(11 lines)
WEISS (m/f)	(8 lines)
SCOOT FARKLE (m)	(7 line)
SANTA (m)	(9 lines)

NOTE: NARRATOR and RAFFI are written as male, but can be changed to female easily.

THE BIG SLEIGH*(6 females, 5 males)*

DASH (m).....	(121 lines)
NIMBLE (f).....	(22 lines)
MRS. CLAUS (f).....	(13 lines)
PRANCER (f).....	(9 lines)
DANCER (f).....	(25 lines)
VIXEN (f).....	(19 lines)
COMET (m).....	(19 lines)
CUPID (m).....	(14 lines)
DONNER (m).....	(12 lines)
BLITZEN (f).....	(14 lines)
SANTA CLAUS (m).....	(31 lines)

MERRY HAN-KWAN-CHRIS-STICE, CARLY GREEN*(4 females, 1 male, 1 either)*

LACY (f).....	(12 lines)
CARLY GREEN (f).....	(23 lines)
LINA (f).....	(10 lines)
SULLY (f).....	(9 lines)
SCHRODINGER (m).....	(6 lines)
SPOONY (m/f).....	(Non-Speaking)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

My father's name is Chris O'Carroll. He is an actor, and he has appeared in at least three different stage productions of *A Christmas Carol*, twice as Scrooge and once as Bob Cratchit. (My younger brother and I were in that last production, too, when we were kids. I played Young Scrooge and he played "Turkey Boy"—I was the one who insisted they use that name for the character in the program). So, as the son of *A Christmas Carol's* Chris O'Carroll, and now the author of, among the other pieces in this collection, *A Christmas Carol Carol*, I was sorely tempted to call this collection *Christmas O'Carroll* or something like that. But that would only work if I was famous. I am not famous, which is probably for the best, so a title like that would cause nothing but head-scratching. Therefore *Chestnuts Roasted* it is, since, after all, that's what I'm doing with at least three or four of these plays—gently "roasting" some holiday classics, or "chestnuts."

I'm a sucker for the holidays. My favorite movie of all time is *It's a Wonderful Life*. I have strong opinions about Rankin-Bass animated specials, proper latke preparation (I'm part Jewish on my mother's side), and which version of the lyrics to "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" is the best. So I am thrilled at the thought that these plays might become part of some people's seasonal celebration.

The plays in this collection can be performed as one evening. Or you can choose just one or two to perform. If you are doing all five, you can perform them in any order, though I think the sequence they're printed in here would be best.

Happy holidays!
Dean O'Carroll
September 2021

ACT ONE
THE HOLIDAY DESSERT DRAFT

***AT START:** COMMENTATOR 1 and COMMENTATOR 2 sit at a table, center stage. There are microphones on stands on stage left and stage right. All entrances and exits should be made quickly so there is no dead space. The cheers, applause, groans, etc. from "the crowd" can be done live or as recorded sound effects.*

COMMENTATOR 1: Hello and welcome to the Holiday Dessert Draft. We have an exciting time ahead of us as all the major holidays will be selecting an official dessert.

COMMENTATOR 2: That's right. And there are a lot of exciting desserts out there and lot of holidays vying for them.

COMMENTATOR 1: Now, the big story this year is Christmas. They have four picks in this draft.

COMMENTATOR 2: Well, every draft needs a 400-pound gorilla.

COMMENTATOR 1: Very true. Time for the first pick. And it's Birthdays.

BIRTHDAYS enters, wearing a party hat and stands at one of the microphones.

COMMENTATOR 2: Birthdays is an unusual franchise, with no fixed date. But I think we can all agree that they have earned their place in this draft.

BIRTHDAYS: With the first pick, we choose... Cake!

Applause. BIRTHDAYS exits.

COMMENTATOR 1: Okay, no surprise there. A conventional but very solid choice.

COMMENTATOR 2: With Cake you have nothing but flexibility. So many flavors, so many options for decorating. My sources tell me Birthdays has a plan involving candles. I'm excited to see how this partnership shapes up.

COMMENTATOR 1: Okay, next up we have Thanksgiving.

THANKSGIVING enters from the opposite side BIRTHDAYS used. THANKSGIVING wears a Pilgrim hat made out of construction paper and stands at the microphone.

COMMENTATOR 2: Now here's a franchise that's all about food.

THANKSGIVING: With the second pick, we choose... Pie.

Applause. THANKSGIVING exits.

COMMENTATOR 1: That's another great pick. Everybody likes some kind of pie.

COMMENTATOR 2: I can really see Pie and Thanksgiving having a great working relationship for a long time. But now here it comes, the Big One. Christmas is about to make its first pick.

CHRISTMAS enters on the opposite side from THANKSGIVING, in a Christmas sweater and possibly a Santa hat.

CHRISTMAS: With the third pick, we choose... Candy Canes.

Puzzled crowd sounds. CHRISTMAS exits, smiling.

COMMENTATOR 1: Um...

COMMENTATOR 2: That's an unconventional choice. There are a lot of really prime desserts that just got left on the table.

COMMENTATOR 1: What the—

COMMENTATOR 2: *(Interrupting.)* Well, Christmas has a few more picks to come, so we'll see if they come back from this.

COMMENTATOR 1: Okay, uh who's next?

HALLOWEEN enters on the opposite side from CHRISTMAS—a traditional costume such as a ghost, witch, or pumpkin.

HALLOWEEN: Boo! Hah! Gotcha! It's me, Halloween. We're going with miniature candy bars. But I think Christmas is playing a trick on us! Hey, Christmas!

CHRISTMAS enters with a candy cane.

CHRISTMAS: Hey, guys!

HALLOWEEN: You're not really taking Candy Canes as your big treat, right?

CHRISTMAS: Of course we are!

HALLOWEEN shrugs and exits. CHRISTMAS waves.

COMMENTATOR 1: Seriously? Candy Canes? Is that even a dessert? That's, like, a decoration.

COMMENTATOR 2: I'm baffled, too. Okay, next up is Valentine's Day.

VALENTINE'S DAY enters next to CHRISTMAS, either in shades of red, white, and pink, or a full baby Cupid getup.

VALENTINE'S DAY: Yeah, we're gonna take boxes of chocolates, but we just want to make sure. Christmas, did you seriously pick Candy Canes?

CHRISTMAS: Yeah! Everybody loves Candy Canes!

VALENTINE'S DAY: Sure. You tell me about what people love.

HANUKKAH enters on the opposite side of the stage—wearing blue and white.

HANUKKAH: Hi, excuse me, Hanukkah here. Do I get to make a pick or what?

CHRISTMAS and VALENTINE'S DAY exit during the following dialogue.

COMMENTATOR 1: Sure, what'll it be?

HANUKKAH: Well, no big deal, but we're going to go with Donuts.

COMMENTATOR 2: Out of nowhere! Hanukkah swoops in and grabs Donuts!

Cheers and gasps.

COMMENTATOR 1: This is a huge steal! You really have to question what Christmas was thinking letting their seasonal rival grab Donuts.

HANUKKAH exits, looking pleased.

COMMENTATOR 2: Well, Christmas has its second pick now. Let's see if they can rebound from their strange misstep.

CHRISTMAS enters.

CHRISTMAS: With the seventh pick, we choose Fruitcake.

Confused crowd sounds.

COMMENTATOR 1: Seriously, what is going on here?

COMMENTATOR 2: Fruitcake? This is certainly a ... uh ... look, I can't put lipstick on this one.

COMMENTATOR 1: Hey, Birthdays, didn't you guys already take Cake?

BIRTHDAYS enters next to CHRISTMAS, eating a piece of cake on a plate.

BIRTHDAYS: Yeah, that's okay. Christmas, you can have Fruitcake. No problem!

CHRISTMAS: Thanks buddy, we're really excited about it.

BIRTHDAYS exits. CHRISTMAS follows.

COMMENTATOR 2: I suppose we should remember that Christmas has a lot going for it as a franchise...

EASTER enters, opposite from where CHRISTMAS exited, either in pastels or a bunny costume.

COMMENTATOR 1: Looks like Easter is about to make its pick.

EASTER: We're going to go with Jelly Beans.

COMMENTATOR 1: Jelly Beans!

Cheers.

COMMENTATOR 1: Thank you! Some sanity.

EASTER: Including black licorice ones.

The cheers abruptly stop. EASTER hops offstage.

COMMENTATOR 1: What the ever-loving—

COMMENTATOR 1 is interrupted by the entrance of INDEPENDENCE DAY, opposite from where EASTER exited, wearing red, white, and blue.

INDEPENDENCE DAY: With the ninth pick, The Fourth of July chooses watermelon.

COMMENTATOR 2: Are we seriously already at fruit?

INDEPENDENCE DAY: Boom!

INDEPENDENCE DAY exits. PURIM enters on the opposite side, wearing a Biblical costume.

PURIM: With the tenth pick, Purim chooses hamantaschen.

COMMENTATOR 1: I don't know what either of those words means.

PURIM: Oh, it's a wonderful holiday and a delicious treat! Do you know the story of Queen Esther?

COMMENTATOR 2: Sorry, but we have to move on because look who's up again.

PURIM exits and CHRISTMAS enters.

CHRISTMAS: With the eleventh pick, we'll take Cookies.

Relieved cheers.

COMMENTATOR 1: Yes! Yes, thank you! Finally some sense. Cookies. Chocolate chips! Oreos! Snickerdoodles!

CHRISTMAS: Oh, no, no, we just want really dry sugar cookies with sprinkles.

Groans.

COMMENTATOR 2: Well, I guess, if you're a kid, a cookie is a cookie.

CHRISTMAS: Oh, the kids won't eat them. They'll leave them on a plate for Santa.

COMMENTATOR 1: How did this get to be the biggest holiday in the world?

CHRISTMAS exits. ROSH HAHANAH enters from the opposite side, shofar in hand.

ROSH HASHANAH: Hello, this is Rosh Hashanah. We have the twelfth pick and we're going to go with Apple Slices Dipped in Honey.

COMMENTATOR 1: That's... not that exciting a treat.

ROSH HASHANAH: Oh, and Yom Kippur told me to tell you they're not picking anything because they have to fast all day.

ROSH HASHANAH exits.

COMMENTATOR 2: These Jewish holidays have... an interesting approach towards food. I gotta say, Hanukkah scoring those donuts is looking more and more impressive all the time.

CHRISTMAS enters again.

CHRISTMAS: I believe we have one last pick now.

COMMENTATOR 1: Okay. Okay. Now, Christmas. Please, please, please... don't blow this.

CHRISTMAS: With the final pick, we take... Pudding.

COMMENTATOR 1: Pudding?

COMMENTATOR 2: ...That sounds reasonable. I mean... I like Pudding.

COMMENTATOR 1: Everyone likes Pudding. But there's another shoe about to drop here. Christmas, when you say "Pudding" do you mean chocolate pudding? Butterscotch? Tapioca?

CHRISTMAS: Well...

COMMENTATOR 1: I knew it!

CHRISTMAS: More like big round baked puddings made out of figs and suet. And people are going to come to your house and sing until you give them some.

CHRISTMAS smiles broadly. Pause.

COMMENTATOR 1: The world no longer makes sense to me.

COMMENTATOR 2: Okay, well that wraps up the Holiday Dessert Draft.

COMMENTATOR 1: Brownies! Rice Krispies Treats! Jell-O! For the love of Pete—Ice Cream! How did nobody pick any of those?

BIRTHDAYS enters again.

BIRTHDAYS: We'll pick up Ice Cream off the waiver wires to put it on the Cake.

COMMENTATOR 2: Well, goodnight and happy birthday.

Blackout.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL CAROL

AT START: *The office of CHARLES DICKENS, 1843. A writing desk and a chair. More pieces will be brought in as needed. Lights up. DICKENS is at his desk, finishing his latest novel.*

DICKENS: "And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!"
(*Puts down his pen.*) There! Finished! I say, good show, Charles. You've done it again. "A Christmas Carol." Very nice, indeed.

Suddenly a mysterious sound, a shift in light and whatever other effects are available introduce THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS CAROLS YET TO COME. She is an eerily dressed woman, seemingly not human.

SPIRIT: Dickens! Charles Dickens!

DICKENS: What the ... well, if you'll pardon the expression, what the Dickens?

SPIRIT: Charles Dickens, I am the Spirit of Christmas Carols Yet to Come.

DICKENS: You're what?

SPIRIT: I am a Spirit from a realm beyond, sent to show you the future.

DICKENS: So... something like the book I've just written?

SPIRIT: Indeed. This new tale of yours will become quite famous, perhaps your most enduring work, a classic, forever a part of the way people will celebrate Christmas.

DICKENS: Well that sounds quite lovely, so if you don't mind, you could really just leave and I shall take you at your word.

SPIRIT: No, Dickens, no. You know not what you have wrought. For this book of yours will not remain just a novel. No, soon it will become a play for the stage, and later, as time and technology march on, it will become a motion picture.

DICKENS: A what?

SPIRIT: Oh, you shall see, Dickens. Again and again and again, you will see your work adapted for new forms of entertainment and media. Unless you act quickly to hide *A Christmas Carol* from the world, it will become an inescapable nightmare that will never die!

DICKENS: You speak so strangely, Spirit. I'm not certain I understand.

SPIRIT: I did not think you would. That is why my fellow spirits and I will show you. At first, adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* will be quite faithful, performed by distinguished British actors, using your words and honoring your intentions. Like... this ...

Lights shift and we are now in the offices of EBENEZER SCROOGE. (We will see several SCROOGES, so this is SCROOGE 1) He is being visited by two GENTLEMEN collecting for charity.

FIRST GENTLEMAN: A few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE 1: Nothing! I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. The Union workhouses, are they still in operation? The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigor? I help to support these establishments; and those who are badly off must go there.

SECOND GENTLEMAN: Many can't go there; and many would rather die.

SCROOGE 1: If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Good afternoon, gentlemen!

Lights shift back to DICKENS and SPIRIT.

DICKENS: Well, that was lovely! That is exactly how I imagined it.

SPIRIT: Yes, all is well and good when the story is performed by talented British actors, but wait until you see it performed by... Americans.

DICKENS: Americans? They have theatre in America? I thought all of their entertainment revolved around banjo-plucking and tooting on empty jugs with three x's on them.

SPIRIT: Observe...

Lights shift again to SCROOGE (SCROOGE 2) and BOB CRATCHIT (CRATCHIT 1). But now they speak with atrocious English accents, as performed by bad American actors.

SCROOGE 2: And you, Bob Cratchit. You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

CRATCHIT 1: If quite convenient, Mister Scrooge.

SCROOGE 2: It is most assuredly not convenient. To pay a day's wages for no work? Poppycock! Humbug!

CRATCHIT 1: Well, blimey, it is only once a year, guv'ner.

SCROOGE 2: Thunderation! A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!

DICKENS: Stop! Stop! Make it stop!

Lights shift back to SCROOGE and the SPIRIT.

SPIRIT: Are you beginning to see my point?

DICKENS: First of all, I am certain there are some American actors who speak with impeccable British accents. But regardless, I shall never see an American production of *A Christmas Carol*, nor shall most Englishmen, so it hardly matters how badly they butcher it.

SPIRIT: But we have barely begun! Theatre may be held in one place, but moving pictures will take this story around the world! You have not yet seen the first time your tale was captured on film, in the early days of the art form, when these pictures are still silent.

Lights shift. Piano music plays, as would be played in a silent movie theatre. The actors now perform as if they were in a silent movie. When they speak, they only move their lips. We are now in SCROOGE'S home (SCROOGE 3). He is sitting quietly.

An ACTOR (ACTOR 1) holds up a placard, looking like a silent film intertitle, reading "Suddenly an eerie sound." The music becomes ominous.

SCROOGE 3: *(Silently mouthing.)* Who's there?

ACTOR 1 holds up another placard saying "Who's there?"

MARLEY enters, a ghost. He moves ghostlike.

MARLEY: *(Silently mouthing.)* Wooooooooooooooooo!

ACTOR 1 holds up a placard reading "Wooooooooooooooooo!"

SCROOGE 3: *(Silently mouthing.)* Egad! It is the ghost of my old partner Jacob Marley who died seven years ago tonight! I am terrified!

ACTOR 1 holds up a placard reading "Egad! It is the ghost of my old partner Jacob Marley who died seven years ago tonight! I am terrified!"

Lights shift back to DICKENS and SPIRIT.

DICKENS: Well, that is... not without its flaws, but nonetheless, I fail to see how this is such a terrible thing.

SPIRIT: But you have not yet seen the worst. For soon, motion pictures will learn to talk and then... to sing!

DICKENS: Sing? Whatever do you mean?

SPIRIT: I mean this:

Lights shift. We are now in a technicolor musical. SCROOGE (SCROOGE 4) is meeting the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST, a sprightly, Broadway type woman.

SCROOGE 4: And who are you, strange spirit?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST: Who, me? Why I'm the Ghost of Christmas Past!

SCROOGE 4: And what does that mean?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST: I'll show you! Two, three, four!

What follows is a lively musical number to the tune of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." It may be staged minimally, for a humorously cheesy effect, in which case you can sing only part of the verse and have the SPIRIT cut the song off early. Or it could be staged more elaborately with, possibly, a second, instrumental verse for dancing.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST:

I'M THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST
 BACK IN TIME WE'LL TRAVEL FAST
 YOU'LL SEE THINGS TO DRIVE YOU WILD
 EBENEZER AS A CHILD!
 WE WILL SEE WHERE YOU WENT WRONG
 WHILE I SING THIS CHEERY SONG
 YOU'LL SEE THE ERROR OF YOUR WAYS
 AND SOME HIGH KICKS AND JETES.
 I'M THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST
 NOW HERE COMES OUR DANCING CAST

OPTIONAL: The rest of the cast enters for a dance number. TINY TIM (TINY TIM 1) does a specialty dance, using his crutch the way Fred Astaire would use a cane. Regardless, the number ends when SPIRIT interrupts it:

SPIRIT: Enough! Enough! Are you beginning to see the problem, Dickens?

DICKENS: Indeed. That was... atrocious.

SPIRIT: You have not seen the worst of it! Wait until television gets its hands on *A Christmas Carol*.

DICKENS: "Tele-vision"?

SPIRIT: Yes, television, full of shows where actors play the same characters every week for years on end! But on Christmas they invariably produce their own "very special episodes" and, very, very often, those episodes will be their "tribute" to your tale.

Lights shift. Scrooge has been replaced by LUCY SCROOGE CARDO, an impersonation of Lucille Ball.

LUCY: Ricky? Ethel? Fred? Where am I?

The GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT enters, an impersonation of Archie Bunker.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: Eh, hold your horses, willya?

LUCY: Who are you?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: Well, if you're Lucy Scroogecardo, then I'm the, eh, Ghost of Christmas Present, there.

LUCY: A ghost? (*Cries a Lucy-esque "Waa."*)

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: Aw, geez, here comes the waterworks. Just relax, willya? I'm just gonna show ya what Christmas is like for your employee, that Bob Cratchit, there.

Lights shift. BOB CRATCHIT (CRATCHIT 2) and MRS. CRATCHIT (MRS. CRATCHIT 1) are sitting down to Christmas Dinner. Now BOB CRATCHIT is an impression of George from "Seinfeld" and MRS. CRATCHIT sounds like Fran Drescher on "The Nanny."

MRS. CRATCHIT 1: I tell you, Bob, that Mrs. Scroogecardo is working you to death. (*Laughs.*)

CRATCHIT 2: Tell me about it! Cratchit's getting angry!

MRS. CRATCHIT 1: Oh, no, the oven isn't working. How are we gonna cook the turkey? Oh, Tiny Tim can help us! Tiny Tim, come on in here!

TINY TIM (TINY TIM 2) enters. He is an impression of Fonzie from "Happy Days."

TINY TIM 2: Aayy! Hey, Mrs. C! Did I hear the oven is broken?

He taps the oven with his fist.

MRS. CRATCHIT 1: You fixed it! (*Laughs.*)

CRATCHIT 2: It's a Festivus Miracle!

TINY TIM 2: God bless us, everyone-amundo!

Lights shift back to DICKENS and SPIRIT.

DICKENS: I have never heard of television and I'm still quite certain that those characters weren't all from the same show.

SPIRIT: No, no, that was a composite pastiche, granted, but, still! And you have not yet begun to see the strange ways this story will be adapted. Yes, I am talking about puppets. Behold... A Pluppet Christmas Carol!

Actors in the next scene move and act like puppets. They bounce when they walk, one arm is motionless, bent against their stomach and the other has a metal rod dangling from it, as if a puppeteer were using the rod to control the arm. They may wear other pieces, false noses, wigs, etc. to make them look more puppet-like.

CRATCHIT (CRATCHIT 3), MRS. CRATCHIT (MRS. CRATCHIT 2), and TINY TIM (TINY TIM 3), now speaking with "puppety" voices are eating Christmas dinner.

MRS. CRATCHIT 2: Here's the turkey!

MRS. CRATCHIT 2 awkwardly carries a tray of food to the table and plops it down. TINY TIM limps to the table on his crutch, the puppet movements making it even more awkward.

TINY TIM 3: Oh, it looks ever so tasty, Mother.

CRATCHIT 3: I would like to propose a toast!

CRATCHIT 3 awkwardly lifts a glass.

CRATCHIT 3: To Mr. Scrooge, the founder of the feast. Yaaay!

MRS. CRATCHIT 2: A toast to who now? That old miser? Why, if I saw him now I'd give him a hai-ya!

MRS. CRATCHIT 2 mimes a karate chop.

CRATCHIT 3: Oh, come now, dear. Surely on this day we can find room in our hearts even for Mr. Scrooge. But enough of that. Let's eat.

The three of them "eat" by lifting food to their mouths and "chewing" it in their mouths, sending pieces flying everywhere.

TINY TIM 3: Oh, that was so delicious! Now I feel like dancing!

CRATCHIT 3: Well, why not?

Music. The three of them dance in a wild, flailing puppet-like manner.

Lights shift back to DICKENS and SPIRIT. Music out.

DICKENS: I... I... Spirit... I am beginning to see your point.

SPIRIT: And you still haven't seen your tale staged through very cheap animation.

Lights shift. SCROOGE (SCROOGE 5) and the black-hooded GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME are onstage, though DICKENS and the SPIRIT are still visible. SCROOGE 5 and YET TO COME move as if they were animated very cheaply. When they speak, their lips—and nothing else—move slightly, but the voices are provided by other actors offstage.

SCROOGE 5: Are you the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?

YET TO COME nods.

SCROOGE 5: And what are you here to show me?

DICKENS: Why are they moving like that? How can they talk by moving their lips but not their chins?

SPIRIT: Welcome to the world of Limited Animation.

YET TO COME points to a tombstone reading "Here lies Ebenezer Scrooge."

SCROOGE 5: Who's grave is this?

SCROOGE 5's feet wheel in place which a cartoon running sound effect is heard. He runs to the stone.

SCROOGE 5: My grave? No! It can't be!

He pounds his fist on the stone in repetitive, jerkily animated style.

Lights shift.

DICKENS: Spirit, you have very nearly convinced me. But, still, to deprive the world of this work... no, no I cannot do it! I will publish *A Christmas Carol*.

What follows now is two versions of the same scene. The first should be used if the play is being produced by a community or regional theatre. The second if the play is being produced by a school.

VERSION ONE: THEATRE

SPIRIT: I feared that you might be unmoved. So now I shall present to you the most dire fate your story will ever suffer. Be warned, Dickens, you shall never be the same once you have seen *A Christmas Carol* as produced by... American Community Theatre!

Thunder sounds.

DICKENS: Oh, dear heavens, that sounds hideous!

SPIRIT: Behold! This is the actor playing Scrooge in this production.

SCROOGE (SCROOGE 6A) stumbles out, now a drunk American community theatre actor.

SCROOGE 6A: It's Christmas Day! So I haven't missed it! Hurrah.
(Mumbles.)

DICKENS: Is he drunk?

SPIRIT: He was once a promising actor, who attempted to tread the boards in New York. But he met with failure at every turn, so he returned to his home town to work in his family's stationery store and to act in community theatre. So, yes, of course he's drunk.

SCROOGE 6A: Bob! Bob Cratchit! There you are.

BOB CRATCHIT (CRATCHIT 4A) enters, now an incredibly nervous community theatre actor, scared and wooden.

CRATCHIT 4A: Why, Mr. Scrooge, what are you doing in my house on Christmas Day?

CRATCHIT 4A trips over a stool.

CRATCHIT 4A: Sorry!

DICKENS: He's... he's the worst actor I've ever seen!

SPIRIT: Oh, he's no actor. His wife just wanted him out of the house.

SCROOGE 6A: Oh, Bob, right I'm.... Line!

ACTOR 2: *(Offstage.)* "Where is Tiny Tim?"

SCROOGE 6A: Yeah, where is the little... *(Mumbles.)*

TINY TIM (TINY TIM 4A) enters. He is now played by an actor far too large to be called "Tiny."

TINY TIM 4A: Here I am!

DICKENS: That's Tiny Tim?

SPIRIT: He has been playing the role of Tiny Tim every year since he was seven years old. He's fifteen now, but he has never been replaced because his mother is the manager of the rec center where they stage the show.

SCROOGE 6A: Tim, my boy. Hop on your Uncle Scrooge's knee!

TINY TIM 4A: All right, sir.

SCROOGE 6A sits and TINY TIM 4A awkwardly climbs onto his lap, amid ad-libs.

SCROOGE 6A: *(Barely squeezing out the line between yelps of pain and discomfort.)* You see, Bob, I've decided to raise your salary and help your poor family and...

SCROOGE 6A and TINY TIM 4A fall over backwards.

TINY TIM 4A: *(Still on his back.)* God bless us, everyone!

CRATCHIT 4A waves sheepishly as faint applause is heard.

END VERSION ONE

VERSION TWO: SCHOOL THEATRE

SPIRIT: I feared that you might be unmoved. So now I shall present to you the most dire fate your story will ever suffer. Be warned, Dickens, you shall never be the same once you have seen *A Christmas Carol* as produced by... An American High School Drama Club! (*Or Middle School, Sunday School, Youth Group, etc., as appropriate.*)

Thunder sounds.

DICKENS: Oh, dear heavens, that sounds hideous!

SPIRIT: Behold! This is the actor playing Scrooge in this production.

SCROOGE (SCROOGE 6B) stumbles out, now a teenage jock.

SCROOGE 6B: It's Christmas Day! So I haven't missed it! Awesome!

DICKENS: Scrooge does not say "awesome."

SPIRIT: This young man was the top athlete in his school until a broken leg caused him to miss the season. Bored, he decided to try the drama club. He was cast because all the other boys who auditioned had acne so bad the director found it distracting.

SCROOGE 6B: What's next? Oh, Bob! Bob Cratchit!

BOB CRATCHIT (CRATCHIT 4B) enters, now an incredibly nervous teenage actor, with a thick foreign accent.

CRATCHIT 4B: Hello, Mr. Scrooge, what are you doing in my house on Christmas Day?

DICKENS: Why is he talking like that?

SPIRIT: He is a foreign exchange student from Mothagaria. His host parents find him creepy so they had him audition for the play to keep him out of the house.

SCROOGE 6B: Oh, Bob, right I'm ... Line!

ACTOR 2: (*Offstage.*) "Where is Tiny Tim?"

SCROOGE 6B: Yeah, right, like she said.

TINY TIM (TINY TIM 4B) enters, now played by a teenage girl.

TINY TIM 4B: Here I am!

DICKENS: That's Tiny Tim?

SPIRIT: When our actor friend here was cast as Scrooge his girlfriend decided she wanted to be in the show, too. This was the part they gave her.

SCROOGE 6B: Tim, my boy. Hop on your Uncle Scrooge's knee!

TINY TIM 4B: Okay.

SCROOGE 6B sits and TINY TIM 4B climbs onto his lap. They immediately start making eyes at each other.

SCROOGE 6B: You see, Bob, I've decided to raise your salary and help your poor family and... and.... Man, you're so hot!

SCROOGE 6B and TINY TIM 4B embrace. They soon topple onto the floor, making out.

TINY TIM 4B: God bless us, everyone!

CRATCHIT 4B waves sheepishly as faint APPLAUSE is heard.

END OF VERSION 2

Whichever version is used, action resumes with lights shifting back to DICKENS and the SPIRIT.

DICKENS: That... that scene isn't even in the book.

SPIRIT: Need I show you more, Dickens?

DICKENS: No. No, Spirit. You have frightened me to my very core. I cannot allow this future to come to pass. I shall burn the manuscript.

SPIRIT: A wise choice, Dickens. And now... I take my leave.

Lighting special to accompany what is supposed to be a grand exit. But as SPIRIT leaves, she trips over the lighting instrument creating the effect. Part of her costume falls off and she is revealed as CAROL, a young woman.

CAROL: (*Now speaking with her natural, non-ghostly voice.*) For crying out loud, Beth! I told you to be careful where you put that!

BETH, the lighting designer holding the instrument, moves to carry it offstage.

BETH: Sorry, Carol.

DICKENS: What's going on here?

CAROL: Oh, er... I have... taken this... guise to...

The rest of the cast enters, some in costumes from the previous scenes, some in running-crew black clothes.

ACTOR 3: Give it up, Carol. He's caught on to us.

CAROL: Oh, all right.

DICKENS: Just who are all of you people?

CAROL: We're the Lisburne Community Players from Lisburne, Massachusetts, (*Or "The Lisburne Regional High School Drama Club." Feel free to change the name and location of the theatre to make a local joke.*) in the year _____. (*Insert this year.*) My name is Carol Dumoulin. I'm the Artistic Director.

ACTOR 4: We traveled back in time and put on this whole show to stop you from publishing *A Christmas Carol*.

DICKENS: You traveled backwards in time?

ACTOR 5: Yeah, we built a time machine.

ACTOR 6: We've got a really great technical director who can build anything.

DICKENS: But why did you want to stop me from publishing this book?

CAROL: You have to understand, Mr. Dickens! Every year, for the past... I don't know how many years, we have produced a production of *A Christmas Carol* at Christmas. Every year! Every single year for this miserable community! They make us do it! They insist! I can't take it anymore! Please, Mr. Dickens! I can't direct another Mr. Fezziwig with a speech impediment. I can't stay up till three in the morning making top hats out of black felt and old oatmeal cannisters. I can't handle another year of convincing the sobbing actress who plays Belle to go onstage even though the

actor playing young Scrooge just left her for the actress playing Martha Cratchit! I just can't do it!

DICKENS: And, do you all feel this way?

Ad-lib rumbles of agreement.

TINA, a small, young actress steps forward.

TINA: Um, excuse me, Carol, Mr. Dickens?

CAROL: What is it, Tiny Tina?

TINA: I actually... kind of like doing *A Christmas Carol* every year.

CAROL: No! No you don't! You hate it! Like all of us do!

TINA: I mean, I understand everything you said. But, I mean, it's always kind of cold and dark in our town in December, but then people come in to see our show and there's all the lights and costumes and music. I like to look out into the crowd before the play starts and I always see people complaining about parking or about Christmas shopping or whatever. But then the play starts and they forget about that. And the people who were complaining the loudest always seem to be the ones who clap hardest at the end. It's like the play does to those people what all the ghosts do to Scrooge. I dunno. It's just what I think.

CAROL: Well... well... the rest of you don't feel that way, do you?

Ad-libs from the others "Yeah, now that you mention it, I kind of do" and such.

CAROL: But, aren't you all sick of this story? Sick of playing these characters?

ACTOR 7: Well, sometimes, yeah. But this is the only show we do all year that my grandmother comes to see.

ACTOR 8: And last year's production sold so many tickets that we made back all that money we lost on _____. (*Title of a recently-produced play.*)

TINA: *A Christmas Carol* makes people happy. Isn't that why we do theatre?

CAROL: Happy? ...Oh, you just had to play the happy card, didn't you?

DICKENS: Allow me to make your decision for you, Ms. Dumoulin. I will send this book to my publisher and I shall allow its future to be whatever it will be.

ACTOR 9: Come on, Carol. Let's go home. We have a dress rehearsal tonight.

ALL but DICKENS start to exit.

CAROL: Can we stop off in 1977 and stop those guys from writing *Annie*? Because I categorically refuse ever to direct another chorus of singing orphans.

ACTOR 10: Hey, maybe next year, instead of *Christmas Carol*, we could do like a parody version of it.

CAROL: No! No! The only thing worse than *Christmas Carol* is parodies of it!

They are gone.

DICKENS: Goodness. What a strange evening. Well, at least it's over.

A MAD SCIENTIST runs on.

MAD SCIENTIST: Dickens! You've got to come back with me! Get in my time machine right away and I'll take you into the future!

DICKENS: Why! What's going to happen in the future?

MAD SCIENTIST: It's those theatre people! You've got to see what they do to *Oliver Twist*!

Blackout.

2020 HINDSIGHT: A STORIED CHRISTMAS

AT START: *This play can be performed as a video presentation, via Zoom or other video conference application. Or it can be performed live. You will find two sets of stage direction, accordingly. The stage version asks for lighting specials to switch off and on, but if your venue does not have such technical capabilities, the same effect could be accomplished by quick entrances and exits.*

SCREEN: *THE NARRATOR will be on screen throughout the play. Other characters pop in and out as he remembers them.*

STAGE: *Lights up. The NARRATOR stands or sits downstage left or right throughout.*

NARRATOR: Looking back now, with many years past since then, 2020 was the strangest year of my childhood. I think anyone who was a kid during that year will tell you that. And no time was stranger than Christmas. Oh, sure, by the end of the year we were all used to quarantine. We were all used to online school, not leaving the house for weeks on end, except for the occasional socially distant playdate where you had to stay six feet apart and rub the ball you were throwing back and forth with hand sanitizer. But Christmas... well it didn't really seem like Christmas. Oh, our teachers tried bravely to make it feel normal. Even my music teacher tried to rehearse our usual, secular holiday concert.

SCREEN: *MUSIC TEACHER appears in a new window.*

STAGE: *MUSIC TEACHER in lighting special.*

MUSIC TEACHER: All right everyone! All together now—"Jingle Bells! Jingle Bells!"—stop stop. Madison, Sophia, and Logan, you're on mute. And, yes, Carter, I know you're singing the "Batman smells" version. And Raffi... Raffi! Raffi, are you paying attention?

SCREEN: MUSIC TEACHER's window closes. RAFFI appears in a new window, staring off into space.

STAGE: Lights out on MUSIC TEACHER. Light special up on RAFFI, staring off into space.

NARRATOR: No. I wasn't paying attention. Oh, that's me there. Raffi Harker, age nine. How could I pay attention when Christmas was coming? When my thoughts could only be about one thing?

SCREEN: New window with RYDER opens, a cowboy.

STAGE: New light special on RYDER, a cowboy.

RYDER: Howdy, Raffi. It's me, Mars Ryder, but you can call me Red. I sure could use your help rounding up desperadoes.

RAFFI: I want to help you, Red!

RYDER: Then you'll need to make sure you get my new game, Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven, for Christmas this year on Xbox or Playstation. You'll do that, won't you?

RAFFI: Yes! Yes I will, Red!

RYDER: Attaboy, Raffi. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got to go blast me some varmints, but, you can tell your parents, I do it according to a moral code that's actually entirely up to you. Adios for now.

SCREEN: RYDER's window closes. MUSIC TEACHER's window reappears.

STAGE: Lights out on RYDER. Lighting special up on MUSIC TEACHER.

MUSIC TEACHER: Raffi! I asked if you were paying attention.

RAFFI: Oh! I'm sorry. My mind wandered. I was thinking about something I really want for Christmas.

MUSIC TEACHER: And what is that?

RAFFI: Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven on Xbox or Playstation.

MUSIC TEACHER: Oh, Raffi, you'll burn your eyes out.

SCREEN: MUSIC TEACHER's window closes.

STAGE: Lights out on MUSIC TEACHER.

NARRATOR: That's what grownups always said. My mother was the worst.

SCREEN: MOTHER appears in a new window.

STAGE: Light special up on MOTHER.

MOTHER: Oh, Raffi, why would we want to get you another video game? You spend all day at online school, staring at screens. Do you really need more screen time? You'll burn your eyes out.

SCREEN: MOTHER and RAFFI's windows close.

STAGE: Lights out on MOTHER and RAFFI.

NARRATOR: My father wasn't much better. If you asked him about video games he'd just start a long story about something he used to play on the first generation Nintendo.

SCREEN: FATHER appears in a new window.

STAGE: Lighting special on FATHER.

FATHER: Oh, you kids don't know from video games. Now, Super Mario Brothers! There was a video game. Did I tell you I was the first kid in my junior high school to find the warp zone on level 4-2? Those other clowns in my class were still playing their way through level by level, dodging koopas and octoroks. Oh, wait, octoroks were in Legend of Zelda. Now that was a game!

SCREEN: FATHER's window closes.

STAGE: Lights out on FATHER.

NARRATOR: See, the old man was one of those Generation X fathers. Not as self-obsessed as a Boomer, and without the online savvy of a Millennial. He just lived in his own bubble of pop culture nostalgia and detached irony. So when his Christmas present to himself arrived early, he was elated.

SCREEN: MOTHER and FATHER appear in separate windows. MOTHER is masked because she is out of the house.

STAGE: Separate lighting specials up on MOTHER and FATHER, each holding a phone as they Facetime each other. MOTHER is masked because she is out of the house.

FATHER: It's here, dear! From eBay! It came!

MOTHER: What is this one, dear?

FATHER: *(Holding up a mailing tube.)* My Farrah Fawcett poster! Vintage!

MOTHER: Wait, you mean the one from the seventies? Where she's in the red bathing suit?

FATHER: Yes! I'm going to put it on the wall of my man cave right behind my desk chair so it'll be in the background for all my Zoom meetings while I'm working from home.

MOTHER: But isn't it a little... not safe for work? And, I mean, that's the computer we use to Skype with my mother.

FATHER: What? No! It's a one-piece bathing suit! And besides, it's not like that anymore. Now it's kitsch! It's ironic! Like my A-Team lunch box and my Last Starfighter wastebasket!

MOTHER: All right.

FATHER: Oh! Look! It shipped internationally! See? It says Fram-jee-lay.

MOTHER: Are you sure that doesn't just say "Fragile"?

FATHER: No, Framji Lei is the seller. His first name is Indian and his last name is Chinese! Oh, yeah, but it shipped from Pittsburgh. Still cool!

SCREEN: FATHER and MOTHER's screens close.

STAGE: Lights out on FATHER and MOTHER.

NARRATOR: One of the nice things about Christmas coming is that teachers had just about given up. Once we only had a few days left of school, they were already checked out till New Year.

SCREEN: RAFFI's screen opens. New screens for SLICK and WEISS open.

STAGE: Individual lighting specials up on RAFFI, SLICK, and WEISS.

NARRATOR: That meant we had a lot of school time to hang out in the class Zoom talking about whatever we wanted. And we all wanted the same thing.

RAFFI: Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven.

SLICK: Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven.

WEISS: Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven.

NARRATOR: Those were my best friends, Slick and Weiss.

SCREEN: A new window opens for SCOOT FARKLE.

STAGE: Lighting special up on SCOOT FARKLE.

FARKLE: Hey, what are you losers talking about? About how you're never going to get Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven?

The kids react in frustration and ALL but NARRATOR freeze.

NARRATOR: That was Scoot Farkle. He was nobody's friend.

The kids unfreeze.

SLICK: I'll have you know, Farkle, that I have already won a copy of RDRRE7!

RAFFI: You did, Slick?

SLICK: Uh huh! I didn't want to say anything until now so I could rub Farkle's face in it! I won it in a contest that I entered online and it's going to be delivered to my house any day!

FARKLE: Oh sure! Like, it's probably sitting on your porch right now!

SLICK: It could be! I'm going to look out the window right now! (*Looks.*) Hey! There's something on the porch! I'm gonna go get it!

SLICK runs out of sight.

NARRATOR: Slick dashed out into the freezing December afternoon air and returned with a metal box.

SLICK reenters holding a metal box in their hands. It's cold and SLICK'S using their sleeves to cover their hands.

WEISS: That's it? In a metal box?

SLICK: Yeah, it's really cold from being outside.

WEISS: Why is it metal?

SLICK: Security!

RAFFI: Open it! Open it!

SLICK: Okay, now the email I got said that the box will only open if I lick it.

WEISS: What?

RAFFI: What?

SLICK: I sent in a saliva sample so the box will only unlock if it senses my spit.

WEISS: But the box is so cold!

RAFFI: It was on your porch! It's like five degrees outside!

FARKLE: What are you? Chicken! Do it! I quadruple quad-donkey dare you!

The kids freeze.

NARRATOR: If there was one thing a kid couldn't ignore in the winter of 2020 it was a quadruple quad-donkey dare. Anyone who lived through that year will tell you it's true and totally not something I made up to make this story seem more folksy.

Kids unfreeze.

SLICK: I'm gonna do it!

SLICK touches their tongue to the box. It freezes, stuck to it immediately.

SLICK: (*Garbled because of the stuck tongue.*) It's stuck! My tongue is stuck!

WEISS: Slick's tongue got frozen to the box!

RAFFI: Is it opening? Slick, is it opening?

SLICK: (*Still garbled.*) No! It's not!

FARKLE: Ha! You idiot! There's no video game in that box! I got you!

WEISS: What?

FARKLE: There wasn't any contest! I set you up! And now that box is frozen to your tongue forever!

Kids freeze.

NARRATOR: It actually melted off about five seconds later, but at the time we believed Farkle. You see, with school online, bullies had to expand their repertoire. Social distancing means no noogies, no wedgies. Our nurple remained unpurple. So the Farkles of the world had to resort to cyber bullying, the long con. And now this scheme he had played on poor Slick had come to its awful, frigid fruition.

Kids unfreeze.

WEISS: Farkle!

RAFFI: Farkle, you're a—a—

FARKLE: What am I? Say it!

Kids freeze.

NARRATOR: I couldn't say it! My mother was in the next room! If she heard me really telling Farkle what I think of him I'd catch it for sure! So I took my only option. I went to the chat.

Kids unfreeze. RAFFI, looking very serious, begins typing. The kids read what RAFFI is typing and stare, aghast. Some ad-lib shock for a moment which turns to pantomime as the NARRATOR starts to speak.

NARRATOR: I began to type the most foul, profanity-laden tirade I could imagine into the chat. I called Scoot Farkle every obscenity I knew and quite a few I made up. To this day, I don't know what a Klop Bupper is, but when I typed it I knew for certain that Scoot Farkle was one. And when I was finished, when my filthy screed was there in the chat for anyone do see, when I had finally told Scoot Farkle what a first rate drunge-knuckle he was, I sat back and watched for a reaction.

FARKLE: Raffi Harker! You're... you're mean!

FARKLE breaks down in tears and quickly moves to leave the Zoom.

SCREEN: FARKLE's window closes.

STAGE: Lights out on FARKLE.

RAFFI is stunned. SLICK (now unstuck) and WEISS ad-lib cheers. Again they freeze.

NARRATOR: I was a hero. And then I realized something.

SCREEN: SLICK and WEISS's windows close

STAGE: Lights out on SLICK and WEISS.

RAFFI's face suddenly looks panicked.

NARRATOR: My teacher could read the chat, too.

SCREEN: RAFFI's panicked face is very close to the camera.

STAGE: Lights out on RAFFI.

NARRATOR: And it turned out my mother had left the house to drop off files for a client. I could have screamed four letter words at the top of my lungs and gotten away with it. But now there was a paperless paper-trail and it led straight to my mother calling me fifteen minutes later.

SCREEN: MOTHER's screen opens. She is video-calling from a cell phone in the driver's seat of a parked car.

STAGE: Individual lighting specials up on MOTHER and RAFFI. MOTHER holds her cell phone as she video-calls RAFFI.

MOTHER: Raffi. I just got off the phone with your teacher.

RAFFI: Oh, Mom! I didn't mean to! I mean! I wasn't—I didn't—

MOTHER: Honey, I've dealt with bullies, too. And we all have moments like that. But you know we don't use language like that, out loud, online, and certainly not in school, even virtual school. But I will make a deal with you. I don't think we need to tell your father about this outburst if you back up my story that it was a total accident when I ripped his Farrah Fawcett poster.

RAFFI: When did that happen?

MOTHER: It's going to happen about thirty seconds after I get home.

RAFFI: Deal, Mom! You got it!

MOTHER: But we still need to have some consequences for your action.

RAFFI: We do?

MOTHER: In the old days, when kids would say dirty words, their parents would wash their mouths out with soap. But you didn't say anything, you typed it, so...

MOTHER and RAFFI freeze.

NARRATOR: My mother washed my fingers out with soap. It wasn't that bad, really.

SCREEN: MOTHER and RAFFI's windows close.

STAGE: Lights out on MOTHER and RAFFI.

NARRATOR: The old man came home to find the poster torn and my mother doing an excellent job of sounding apologetic. So, heartbroken, he turned to his other obsession—buying an air fryer big enough to cook our Christmas turkey. Unfortunately, following a few too many nostalgic purchases, his budget for novelty, cooking appliances was low, which meant his purchase took him to some spurious websites.

SCREEN: FATHER appears in a new window, clearly shopping online.

STAGE: Light special up on FATHER with a laptop, clearly shopping online.

FATHER: Ah, this is promising. I mean, what's a better country to buy a turkey cooker from than Turkey? Oh, wait, not Turkey, Turkmenistan. Oh, wait, no ... not Turkmenistan ... "Jerkmoria"? I've never heard of that country. Well, a bargain's a bargain! *(He clicks.)*

SCREEN: FATHER's window closes.

STAGE: Lights out on FATHER.

NARRATOR: But one-click purchasing wasn't an option for me. So I had to take my quest for Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven right to the top, the man in red, the North Pole VIP! Unfortunately, visiting Santa at the local mall wasn't really an option in a year of social distancing, but luckily there were places to talk with the jolly man himself online.

SCREEN: RAFFI appears in a new window. Another window opens with a logo that reads "Please ho-ho-hold on! You'll be connected with Santa in just a minute!" That screen disappears and is replaced by SANTA—a guy in a less-than-great Santa suit, clearly just in his own living room. His screen name identifies him as "Dave Hirschenfang."

STAGE: Light special up on RAFFI. Separate light special up on an empty space. SANTA (a guy in a less-than-great Santa suit) enters hurriedly.

RAFFI: Hi Santa!

SANTA is saying something but nothing can be heard.

RAFFI: Um, Santa? I think you're on mute.

SANTA mouths something unpleasant in frustration. He clicks and his sound turns on just as he is saying—

SANTA: —this stupid piece of—*(Shifting to his Santa voice.)* Oh! Here we go! Ho ho ho! Merry Christmas! What's your name, little boy?

RAFFI: Uh... Raffi. But why does your window say your name is Dave Hirschenfang?

SANTA: Oh, whoops. Hold on.

SANTA clicks, humming a Christmas tune to distract RAFFI.

SCREEN: SANTA's screen name changes to "Sabta."

SANTA: All better. And have you been a good boy this year?

RAFFI: Well, I—

SANTA: Whoa!

SANTA quickly covers the camera with his hand.

SANTA: Honey! Don't come in here like that! I've got a kid on! Yes!

SANTA removes his hand.

SANTA: Sorry about that, Ricky. Mrs. Claus just got out of the shower!

RAFFI: Oh.

SANTA: So, what can I get you for Christmas or whatever?

RAFFI: I want a copy of Red Dead Ryder Rendition Edition Seven!

SANTA: Oh, kid. You'll burn your eyes out!

SCREEN: RAFFI and SANTA's screen close.

STAGE: Lights out on RAFFI and SANTA.

NARRATOR: You'll burn your eyes out! You'll burn your eyes out! Is that all grown-ups knew how to say? On Christmas Eve I lay in bed, tossing and turning as they ran through my head!

SCREEN: One by one windows with the following characters open for one line, then close again.

STAGE: Light special up on RAFFI. Other characters enter and pass by him for their one ghostly line, then exit.

MOTHER: You'll burn your eyes out!

MUSIC TEACHER: You'll burn your eyes out!

SANTA: You'll burn your eyes out!

SCREEN: RAFFI's window closes.

STAGE: Lights out on RAFFI.

NARRATOR: But then, on Christmas morning, there it was.

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CHESTNUTS ROASTED

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