

DEC. 26

By Mark Saunders

SYNOPSIS:

It's the day after one very special Christmas and Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge, skinflint extraordinaire, finally has a solid good night's sleep under his belt. In a word, he's back to his old self, fit as a broken fiddle. The good-natured Cratchit, on the other hand, is in his usual inexplicable high spirits and, unfortunately, is ill prepared for what lurks ahead. Woe is Cratchit.

CHARACTERS:

Ebenezer Scrooge - Stock character, the old miser himself

Bob Cratchit - Stock character, generally upbeat, plays the manic to Scrooge's depressive

SETTING: Victorian England. Scrooge's office. A large comfortable chair--Mr. Scrooge's favorite chair--and next to it a small table covered in cloth. A hat rack in one corner.

TIME: Early morning, December 26, the day after Christmas.

PROPS: As needed to convey Scrooge's office in Victorian England. Large comfortable chair. Small table covered in cloth. A hat rack. A large bottle of chewable antacids. The usual Victorian hats, winter coats, etc.

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AT RISE: A happy BOB CRATCHIT, wearing his trademark ratty white sweater, whistles a holiday tune while cleaning up the office. Beat. EBENEZER SCROOGE enters, covered in his trademark dark winter wraps, overcoat, and top hat.

CRATCHIT

And a good morning to you, Mr. Scrooge. A very good morning indeed.

Cratchit reaches to help Scrooge off with his coat. Scrooge slaps his hand.

SCROOGE

What's good about it?

CRATCHIT

Why, sir, everything. The sky is clear, snow fresh, air brisk. London's never been prettier. And, I might add, I have never been happier.

SCROOGE

What day is it?

CRATCHIT

The twenty-sixth of December. Boxing Day. A day when charity reigns supreme.

SCROOGE

Hah. And what day was it before that?

CRATCHIT

Christmas, sir. The most glorious day of the year. Of course you remember. You promised me a raise.

SCROOGE

A raise?

CRATCHIT

And we were to discuss, ahem, "affairs." Today, I believe.

SCROOGE

Discuss affairs, with a little man like you? Poppycok and balderdash. What I remember is I fired your worthless ass on the twenty-fourth of December and you're still here.

CRATCHIT

Fired?

SCROOGE

I meant to, probably didn't get around to it. Bloody memory problems. The wisdom of the ages gets more forgetful as it ages, Cratchit. Remember that. If you should live so long.

CRATCHIT

But, sir, but, but I thought. You said. Yesterday. At my house?

SCROOGE

Today is different. I wasn't myself yesterday. I hadn't slept. A bit of undigested beef and all those nightmares. But last night --

CRATCHIT

-- Yes?

Scrooge grabs the medicine bottle; it's a bottle of chewable pills. Scrooge and Cratchit turn to the audience. They walk forward to the edge of the stage.

Scrooge points to the bottle. They break character for a product placement commercial.

SCROOGE

Last night I took Digestiva, a powerful over the counter antacid that works miracles. Ask your doctor about...

CRATCHIT

... Digestiva. When you want to sleep through the night and wake up rested, in good spirits...

SCROOGE

...Take Digestiva Chewables. Now in twenty-four tropical flavors...

CRATCHIT

... Side effects may include headaches, swelling around the eyes, heart palpitations or aches and pains in the joints...

SCROOGE

... Fluid retention or excessive hair growth...

CRATCHIT

... May cause fast heart rate, dizziness or a drop in blood pressure when you stand up, cold hands and feet, tiredness or depression, a slow heartbeat or symptoms of asthma...

SCROOGE

... A skin rash, loss of taste, a chronic dry, hacking cough, and in rare instances, kidney damage...

CRATCHIT

... Anxiety, back pain, breakthrough bleeding, breast tenderness, depression, flatulence, flu-like symptoms, restless leg syndrome and an urge to gamble...

SCROOGE

... Bleeding of the eye, convulsions, seizures, decreased or double vision or in extreme cases blindness...

CRATCHIT

... And prolonged, painful, or inappropriate stiffness of the willy that could last longer than four hours... Do not take Digestiva if you are pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant.

SCROOGE

... Do not drive heavy machinery while taking this drug.

CRATCHIT

... Of if you have a stiff willy.

SCROOGE

I'm sensing a pattern here.

CRATCHIT

... If you have nightmares or insomnia or get depressed, tell your doctor.

Scrooge sets the bottle back down. They return to their previous spots and to their respective roles.

CRATCHIT (CONT'D)

What about Tiny Tim? What about what my young Tim said?

SCROOGE

What about it?

CRATCHIT

He said, "God bless us everyone," and you cheered. In my very house, in front of my wife and children. You cheered. We all cheered. You cheered the loudest.

SCROOGE

I told you I wasn't myself yesterday. Whatever I was, is, well, over now. End of story.

CRATCHIT

You said I would get a raise? You were suddenly generous.

SCROOGE

Poppycock! I pay you but fifteen bob a week. Nobody would call that generous. Not even I. Frugal, yes. Parsimonious, perhaps. But generous? No. I should say not. Absolutely not generous.

CRATCHIT

But, but... From now on it was going to be different. You said so.

SCROOGE

In the many years you've known me, Cratchit, would you expect me to be generous? Ever? Did the words "Scrooge" and "generous" ever appear together in the same sentence? Except, perhaps, as a contradiction. All these years. Ever?

CRATCHIT

Of course not, sir. But, but something changed you. The other night. You said you had a revelation.

SCROOGE

I had constipation.

CRATCHIT

But we all saw it. You changed. And you promised me a raise. On Christmas Day.

SCROOGE

Balderdash. Christmas is over or haven't you read the papers.

CRATCHIT

Over?

SCROOGE

A leopard can't change his spots.

CRATCHIT

Spots?

SCROOGE

Because of one night you expect a raise? Think hard, little man, did I put it in writing?

CRATCHIT

No. But, but -- why just yesterday you were such a philanthropist.

SCROOGE

That was yesterday. Today I have philanthropist's remorse. What's one day of the year compared to three hundred and sixty four days? I ask you one question, Cratchit: which me, do you think, is the real me? Which Ebenezer Scrooge is the real Ebenezer Scrooge?

CRATCHIT

Now that you put it that way, sir, I'd rather you were generous the rest of the year and a cheap bastard, if you pardon my French, only on one day.

SCROOGE

Oh, I imagine you would. Your kind always would. And with such attitudes you would destroy the hard-earned, dog-eat-dog foundations of capitalism itself, the bread upon which your very crumbs depend. We have a word for your kind.

CRATCHIT

Yes?

SCROOGE

Poor.

CRATCHIT

But, but -- Oh, my God, Mrs. Cratchit is out shopping at this very moment. Spending my raise.

SCROOGE

Shopping you say?

CRATCHIT

At those after-Christmas specials.

Cratchit takes several tablets from the bottle and chews.

SCROOGE

Bully for her. Shopping is good for the economy.

CRATCHIT

You just said I had no raise.

SCROOGE

Quite right. No raise indeed. And no job. I say, pitiful circumstances you find yourself in, eh, Cratchit, on this twenty-sixth day of December?

CRATCHIT

Yes. No, but -- my Tim said, "God bless us everyone." Those were his very words. God bless us everyone.

SCROOGE

God helps those who help themselves. It would behoove you to remember that, little man. Which reminds me, Cratchit, on your way out help yourself to one lump of coal.

CRATCHIT

A lump?

SCROOGE

Of coal. Just one lump, mind you. We'll call it your severance package.

A despondent Cratchit grabs a piece of coal. He returns and faces Scrooge. Cratchit shakes his fist with the coal in it at Scrooge. Cratchit turns to leave, then returns quickly and grabs the bottle of antacids.

CRATCHIT

You'll regret this, Scrooge. What goes around comes around.

SCROOGE

The only thing I regret is not getting a good night's sleep. And the only thing going around is you out of my shop. Now be off with you or I'll call the constable.

Scrooge settles into the chair. He reaches under the table for what's hidden behind the table cloth. He pulls out another bottle of antacids and sets it on the table.

CRATCHIT

Bah! Humbug!

Cratchit puts on his overcoat slowly. He grabs his hat and moves to exit. But he can't. Head down, he's frozen, unable to move.

SCROOGE

“Bah humbug?” I kind of like the way that sounds. Bah. Humbug. I'm feeling more like my old self. Lonely. Bitter. Miserable. A dependable bottle of tropical-flavored antacids within arm's reach to make sure I sleep through the night. Bah. Humbug.

Scrooge opens the bottle, shakes out a couple of tablets, and puts them in his mouth. He beams.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

(almost giddy)

I'm back.

Suddenly, Scrooge CHOKES on a tablet.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

Cratchit! Help me. Get over here. Cra-Cra-Cratchittttt!

Cratchit turns and watches. Scrooge GAGS and CHOKES. It's a drawn-out, ham-encrusted dying scene worthy of a melodrama.

Scrooge slumps in his chair [or falls on the floor]... dead. Cratchit rushes over and checks Scrooge's pulse.

Cratchit picks up the bottle and reads the label to himself. Cratchit stares at the audience.

CRATCHIT

Hmm. Dickens was right. There appears to be a nasty side effect to being a cheap bastard after all.

Beat.

CRATCHIT (CONT'D)

Here's the thing: apparently when it's all over and you die, you die alone, unloved, slumped or fallen, in a ratty old chair or on a cold floor, in the middle of a quiet room. No more alive or memorable than a lump of coal. Saddest of all, nobody cares whether you had lived or died. Out, out brief candle and all that. Dead as a doornail, to quote the bard.

Cratchit ponders his own comment.

CRATCHIT (CONT'D)

Oh, well. Chin up. The sky outside is still clear, the air still brisk. Fresh snow covers the ground. Life goes on out there even though there is death in here, inside, behind these very closed doors. No more tomorrows for Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge, Esquire, I dare say. Hmm. I suppose I should start boxing up his things to sell. It is, after all, Boxing Day. And Mr. Scrooge most certainly didn't take any possessions with him, try as he might. Why he, himself, told me to help myself. Those were his very words. God helps those who help themselves, he said.

Cratchit starts to box a few items. He stops and stares at the audience again.

CRATCHIT (CONT'D)

You know, just between you and me, I don't think Mr. Scrooge ever understood how God helps. With the exception of one sleepless night, perhaps. But the rest of his life? Bah, humbug.

(END OF PLAY)