

# A Contemporary Christmas Carol

By Mark Mc Quown

A dramedy in One Long Act

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ACT ONE

(A few minutes prior to curtain, a wide screen television set comes on in the fast paced Entertainment Agency, Scroge/Mayfield, in downtown Beverly Hills. The female announcer is doing a normal news show program from behind a news desk.)

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

This last segment on 'global warming' has been produced for us by the same team which covered that horrible hurricane 'Gustav' as it slammed into New Orleans earlier this year in September. We're going to take a short break now to acknowledge more of the wonderful folks who support this program. One quick note just before we leave. The local weather service is now announcing that a major cold front is coming into southern California which might bring the possibility of snow in Los Angeles. Are we ready for a white Christmas, wouldn't that be a miracle?

(The CAMERA dollies back to reveal a Male News Anchor sitting next to his co-anchor at the same desk.)

(The Theatre lights fade to black.)

MALE NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

Don't touch that dial. Stay tuned with us for more fascinating news and history on super agent Elgin Scroge as our weekly program, "Entertainment Icons", continues. We'll be back in ninety seconds.

(They both restack the papers sitting in front of them. A voice from off camera says 'all clear'. The female anchor turns to her co anchor and says, )

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR

Whose Elgin Scroge?

(The lights come up on the interior of the agency which is in dire need of renovations and extra help as Bob Cricket answers the telephone. There is Christmas music playing from a small machine on Bob's desk but its barely audible.)

BOB

Scroge/Mayfield. I'm sorry; Mr. Scroge is out of the office at the moment, could I . . . hello, hello?

(He puts the phone back on the receiver and walks over to the heater thermostat and tries to adjust the heat.)

E.S. (O.S.)

Cricket, don't touch that thermostat.

(Bob hurries back to the front desk.)

E.S. (O.S.)

...its fixed now so you can only change the temperature from this office.

BOB

But Mr. Scroge, its freezing in here.

(Elgin Scroge emerges from his back office, dressed in a suit made forty years ago. Bob quickly shuts off the music. Elgin walks to the window facing the street and listens to the sound of traffic race by.)

E.S.

Its invigorating. It keeps your brain awake. Look at this Bob, look at all these people in their cars or rushing by on the sidewalk – all running to spend money.

BOB

Yes sir it's the Christmas spirit.

E.S.

Hah!! Christmas spirit. It's a hoax, all a hoax foisted upon us by some unseen capitalist who found out a long time ago what motivates man to part with his money.

(He turns back into the office where he circles the photographs and signed head shots of famous actors which line the walls.)

E.S.

Here, hanging on these walls, is the true spirit of money. Actors are like little money robots – they go out and act and then someone magically sends me a check. Walla! Man parts with his money – to me. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

(The telephone rings.)

BOB

Scroge/Mayfield. I'm sorry but Mr. Scroge is. . .

(He is interrupted by Elgin who picks up a side telephone.)

E.S.

This is Elgin Scroge. Scroge, S C R O G E, just like its ... hello, hello?

BOB

We're getting a lot of those today. And, speaking of today, sir, since this is Christmas Eve, I thought that...

E.S.

I know Bob! You thought that you might leave early and close down the phones at Scroge/Mayfield – one of the best named Entertainment Agencies in . . .

(The telephone rings.)

BOB

Scroge/Mayfield. Yes, may I say who is...

(E.S. shakes his head and hands to say 'no' and he disappears back into his office.)

BOB

...I'm so sorry but evidently Mr. Scroge just left. Can I take a... hello, hello?

E.S. (O.S.)

All right Bob, but don't expect me to pay you for time you don't spend in the office. I'll take care of the rest of the day – just like every other year at this time.

(Bob hurries and gathers his coat and some shopping bags. He rushes to the front door but the door opens and in walks Fred.)

FRED

Merry Christmas Uncle – and you to Bob and your family. How is your daughter Tina doing?

BOB

We're trying to get her a new operation – suppose to be the new and upcoming thing in surgery – she may get to skate again.

FRED

That would be incredible. She was such a shining star on the ice. Merry Christmas Bob.

BOB

And to you Fred and yours. Thank you.

(Bob goes out as E.S. emerges from his back office.)

E.S.

Fred as I live and breathe. What brings you to Beverly Hills at this time of day; rush hour traffic and all.

FRED

Yes, I know and I tried to escape it but when I called, you were out.

E.S.

Oh, not really, just keeping up the appearance of being busy – you know the scene.

FRED

I do Uncle and wonder sometimes how I would have survived without being represented by Scroge/Mayfield Entertainment Partners. And to that end,

we are having a Christmas dinner tonight and would love to have you join us at our house in Hollywood. We'll come and get you of course.

E.S.

Fred, that's very kind of you but I've already accepted an invitation from some actors who've been with us since Marley Mayfield joined the company.

FRED

God rest his soul.

E.S

As well he should.

FRED

Well, I know everyone will be disappointed. We'll miss you Uncle Scroge so – Merry Christmas and Happy New Year if we don't see you before.

E.S.

Fred, I know you'll understand this, being a professional actor. Christmas sucks! In the language of that perennially done play-slash-movie-slash-TV Show-slash-movie on TV – humbug!!! Drive safe kid. Click it or ticket.

(They both laugh as Fred turns and goes out the front door. E.S. walks to the door and locks it. He turns the sign in the window to closed. He turns around and looks at the outer office.)

E.S.

Huh. After all these years – I just never understood this insanity for Christmas. People, rich or poor, out in the streets, in the stores, in the restaurants, buying, buying, buying – so when a certain morning arrives, they can all get out of bed and tear open boxes and ribbons and stuffing – to see what someone else gave them. I guess its that gift part that really galls me. No one gets anything for free! There's always some reason – some payoff and that is what all of this craziness around Christmas is all about.

(There is a knocking at the front door. Elgin turns and unlocks the door. A man enters with an attractive young lady carrying a black, zippered case.)

CHARITY MAN

Scroge/Mayfield Entertainment, is that correct? Are you Mr. Scroge or Mr. Mayfield?

(Elgin walks away from them back to Bob's phone desk and sits.)

E.S.

Marley Mayfield died seven years ago – seven years ago on this every night.

(Elgin looks up at the clock and then checks the watch on his arm.)

CHARITY MAN

I'm sorry to hear that.

CHARITY WOMAN

We're very sorry to hear that.

E.S.

If you two think you're an act you better do something better than this miserable routine or go back out the door and try somewhere else.

(The charity couple look at each other in apprehension.)

CHARITY WOMAN

Oh no sir, you misunderstand. We represent a non-profit organization called "Save The Children", where for a small, monthly donation, you can support a child in a third world country for...

E.S.

Why?!

CHARITY MAN

Why sir?

E.S.

Yes, why would I support a child in a third world country when I'm finding it progressively more difficult to support myself in this country. Have you seen the price of gas lately. We're an agency – we drive actors and celebrities all over the place. You see where I'm going with this?

CHARITY WOMAN

Please forgive us. We thought that...

CHARITY MAN

...since you donated in the past...

CHARITY WOMAN

...through Mr. Mayfield and since this is...

CHARITY MAN

...almost Christmas, we thought...

E.S.

Well, you thought wrong. If you want to support all the children who need it, make more money available in their own country with their own relatives and if not – let's go back to the poorhouses in England in the mid nineteenth century, that worked fairly well if my sense of history is correct. Probably decreased the surplus population.

CHARITY WOMAN

You – can't be serious.

E.S.

I'm as serious as a heart attack. Now please leave my place of business since I have no money to spare and please remove us from the list of your non-profit

company – whatever the hell non-profit means, anyway. Good day.

(They turn and leave in a fright. E.S. locks the door again and makes sure the sign says closed. He carefully walks across to a book cabinet and presses a secret button. The book cabinet slides to one side revealing a small, studio style kitchen. E.S. puts on an apron and a chic, chief's hat and begins preparing a meal.)

E.S.

I'll tell you what Christmas is in reality. Less business, more Christmas commercials and toy commercials – but we represent real actors; not commercial trash. This is a proud agency with a long standing name in the business and a heritage of film stars. Christmas is not movie season – its the season where you show a Christmas movie – if you have one.

(He sits at Bob's desk and drinks hot tea.)

E.S.

It's the season to be taken – everywhere you look is the glitter of hope and the glitz of a new beginning– but not for us. I used to live in a ten thousand dollar a month apartment in Beverly Hills, just around the corner – now I live here – in my – agency – where I was once...

(He walks to the large glass window facing the street and peers out.)

E.S.

My God, what is going on? It's freezing outside. Its - snowing in Beverly Hills.

(The sound of a group of 'carolers' on the sidewalk makes Elgin close the leveler blinds. He walks back to his kitchen and pulls a carton of noodles out of the microwave and sits down. He unconsciously looks through a stack of headshots while he eats.)

E.S.

More heat, more electricity, more bills – less food. I'm a rich man eating hot Ramon and tea for dinner. All for Christmas. All for naught. Because money is so tight and people don't want to spend ten bucks to see a new movie. You can lose the power of your name in Hollywood – over night. No name, no game.

(He suddenly stands up holding a head shot in terror. He screams and throws the photograph to the ground and steps away from it.)

E.S.

That face – moved. It can't be. He's never had a head shot. He was an agent! And he's dead – Marley is dead, I went to the funeral myself. Cost a fortune. He died.

(Elgin gets down on his hands and knees and collects the head shot. He places it on

the table near the noodles. He looks down at it in fright as he hears the SOUND of chains being drawn across his floor.)

E.S.

What, in the name of all that is Holy, is going on here?

(The head shot speaks to him from the table top.)

MARLEY

Elgin. Elgin Scroge. It's me, Marley Mayfield.

E.S.

What – what are you doing here?

MARLEY

Elgin, turn on the flat screen.

(E.S. turns to a large flat screen mounted on the wall of the reception area. He points a remote at the screen and it turns on revealing Marley Mayfield, wrapped in a chain with tiny gold chests welded to the links.)

MARLEY

I never left Elgin. I'm forced to stay here where I forged this chain around my neck with these chests of hope. Each one – a failed actor's life that we used up and then tossed back into the great sea of the unemployed.

E.S.

But Marley, that is what agencies do. We're a grist mill for actors who make us money.

(A huge theatrical explosion of SOUND comes out of the theatre-surround speakers in the agency. Elgin drops on the floor and covers his head.)

E.S.

Don't hurt me, please don't hurt me.

(The flat screen is alive with Marley's face.)

MARLEY

I'm not here to hurt you E.S. I'm here to help you – to warn you – that I cannot go to heaven or any place until all the generations of all who we have hurt in this business – have passed. Look at me Elgin. And take off that ridiculous outfit.

(Elgin crawls up from the floor on his knees and removes his cooking hat and apron. He looks carefully at the screen.)

MARLEY

This chain of crushed hopes and dreams was forged in my life time but the chain which waits for you – was twice this long the year I died. Elgin,



don't be a fool. Don't follow your partner's horror into a world filled with pain and hopeless desire. Help me, please. Help – yourself.

(Lightning flashes outside and the lights blink inside. The screen goes off as Elgin looks for someplace to hide.)

E.S.

Where are you? It's a trick isn't it? Some kind of new – FX trick. To scare me. Where are you all? Show yourselves! You better have something better than this because...

(A mist seeps slowly through the keyhole on the door to the street.)

E.S.

Fog juice – being blown into my key hole. Very clever. Old but clever.

(Marley's voice comes from the photograph on the table. Elgin drags himself to the table and stares in horror at the talking picture.)

MARLEY

Listen to me Elgin; I only have a few more moments.

E.S.

I – don't know how they do this photograph – that's good. Very good. I'll just throw it away and then see what they...

MARLEY

You will be visited by three spirits – the spirits of Christmas past, present and future. They are older actors, who we used and then used up. The first will come tonight, right after Leno. The next will arrive the next night also just after Leno.

E.S.

Two nights of Leno, Marley, I don't know how I could stand that!

MARLEY

Elgin, this is serious as it could possibly be. You are being offered a chance ...

E.S.

...a chance – to move back to Brentwood? Say its so!!

MARLEY

The third will come the following night at the strike of midnight on your snooze-alarm.

E.S.

Marley, won't they take a meeting. Can't we discuss the possibility of seeing them all during FOX Nightly News, please? I have a business to...

(Marley's voice explodes again over the arena speakers. Elgin falls back on the floor.)

MARLEY

Scroge, don't fail me in this or my own spirit will wonder through the empty halls of this cold, ugly agency that should have been remodeled twenty years ago. And Elgin – get some new clothes for God sakes.

E.S.

Remodeled? Don't you remember what we're paying a square foot here.

(The mist is slowly sucked back out the key hole.)

MARLEY

Elgin. Listen to these Spirits, your immortal soul and our name depends on the outcome.

(The screen goes blank.. Elgin tries to turn the screen back on but it doesn't work. He looks behind the screen but sees nothing. He crosses back to the window and looks out through the blinds. He looks at the lock where the mist came through and finally he returns to the desk and the head shot. Without looking, he picks up all the head shots and tosses them in a waste paper basket.)

E.S.

Can't be. It just couldn't be. Who do they think I am? Remodel the agency, Marley would never have said that. Some – kind of stupid Christmas joke and – and I am not going to fall for it.)

(He looks under the table for any sign of anything. He crosses back to the wall and slides the kitchen wall back to the book case. He steps to the other side of Bob's desk and slides a wall panel to one side exposing a Murphy Bed which he pulls down and sits on. He claps his hands and the lights dim down.)

E.S.

Nineteen dollars and ninety nine cents on TV and I got two for the price of one. 'The clapper'. I just liked the name I guess. What time is it? Un ho. Leno's almost over and I mean that in more ways than one. I'll just sit here and see – see what there is to see. Can't be real. Except – I saw something. Maybe it is time for Lens Crafters.

(Elgin hears a noise and stops. He looks around. He hears Bill Haley and The Comets, doing "Rock Around The Clock". Then he sees it – it's a strange figure--like a child and also like an old man hidden behind some mask or scrim which gave him the appearance of having receded and diminished to a child's proportions. His hair is long and white and hangs down below his neck. The arms are very long and muscular and legs and feet, most delicately formed, are like those members of a puppet character, dangling on strings and supported by sticks. The spirit moves to 50's music.)

E.S.

Oh boy, I'm paying for it now – all those prescriptions for sleep are coming back on me. Better make an appointment tomorrow. I'll see that Doctor/Actor and...

(The puppet motions for Elgin to come towards him.)

E.S.

This is ridiculous. Do you know who I am?! I can kill you in this town on a phone call!!

(The puppet still beckons with his hand and arm for Eglin to come to him.)

E.S.

Say, who are you anyway? Or – what are you?

SPIRIT ONE

I am the ghost of Christmas past.

E.S.

Is that a union role?

(The puppet sits in front of a large Projection Screen and waves his arm. Sparkles of light flash across the screen and then images which are out of focus, slowly come into focus.)

E.S.

Hey, look here, if you want to pitch a film, you have to call me and make an appointment and then ...

(He realizes the person on the screen is himself in his twenties.)

E.S.

Wait just a minute! I didn't authorize you to film me. You have to get a signed 'release'. You have to contact my agent – which is me - and then...

(He looks closer as he walks towards the screen.)

E.S.

Which Christmas past are you?

SPIRIT ONE

Your past!

(The screen shows Elgin, sitting in an empty classroom at a desk where he reads the newest copy of Variety Magazine. He makes notes on a lined pad of paper.)

E.S.

Look, I don't have to explain myself now or in the past. You see me there. I was the loner of my class because I was the only one who understood the importance of being

on top in the entertainment industry. I was the only one in that class room who owned a stock, could see how the cell phone would take off in the future. That is how I got here - that is how I made a name and don't you forget it.

(The movie dissolves into Eglin in his middle twenties, sitting at a desk in a Hollywood Agency and answering phones. Elgin's sister Fiona comes in and greets her brother. He shows her around the agency. They walk towards the screen and then come walking out of the back office and onto the live stage. They pass Elgin.)

FIONA

Its really great. I'm so proud of you. Mom and dad would be to, you know that.

ELGIN

I know. Sure I know. Anyway, hey, sit down and I'll get us a coke.

FIONA

Great, I could use something to drink.

(Elgin removes two cokes from a small, under the counter refrigerator and returns to Fiona where they sit. E.S. comes up beside his sister.)

ELGIN

So, how is it going, with – you know – your guy – the doctor thing, etc, etc.

FIONA

I don't really want to talk about it. I'm just so broke and the doctor bills are just...

ELGIN

Listen - I'm trying to put some money together for you so you can...

FIONA

I know. I know Elgin, that you would help me if there was any way possible.

(They drink their sodas.)

SPIRIT ONE

Was there no way possible Scroge?

E.S.

No!! I could barely pay my rent plus I had to buy clothes so I looked good in the agency – if you want to make a name, its all about how you look, don't you remember? The sixties were clothes and hippies and I wasn't a hippy.

SPIRIT ONE

I remember Elgin. I think you're still wearing those clothes.

ELGIN

And – I mean – You know - What – about the – other thing?

FIONA

I'm pregnant.

ELGIN

Oh God Fiona, you can't have a – I mean, you have to have a – where is the money going to come from?

FIONA

Stop it. Stop right now because I know how you get when we talk about money. Listen - I have an idea. Let's go down to that ice cream store and have a small cone – like we used to do when mom and dad were here.

ELGIN

You didn't answer the question.

FIONA

What can I say. I live on hope and I pray on it ever day because I know someone is listening. What's wrong?

(Elgin nervously feels through his pockets.)

E.S.

I never kept any money on me. I always...

SPIRIT ONE

Hid it away for a rainy day?

FIONA

Don't worry Elgin, I brought enough for ice cream. Come on, its my treat.

(She takes his arm and leads him out the front door of the agency. Elgin follows her closely.)

ELGIN

You can't just live on hope Fiona. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Trust me. If dad and mom taught us anything it's that there's no...

FIONA

You're such a cynic Elgin. Please, lets just have a nice time together and leave all this other to a later date. Please.

(They exit)

E.S.

No one really knows I had a sister. She had an oversized heart condition and ...

SPIRIT ONE

... died when you were working on your first film. She died alone did she not? In General Hospital?

E.S.

We didn't have any insurance. We were poor like – illegal immigrants in our own country – but nobody stepped up to the plate – until it was too late.

SPIRIT ONE

I know. I was there. Acting. For your little start up company but – you never knew me. You never helped me out or your stingy partner Marley. No – you sent me to every background audition there was so I never got my chance to strut my stuff.

E.S.

I remember you. You were an extra. That's what you were. If you had realized that you would have died happy but you got mixed up like most actors do in Hollywood and you saw yourself as something you weren't and that's when tinsel town takes you down and it did.

(The puppet and Elgin look at each other for a moment.)

SPIRIT ONE

But you never got that money, isn't that right?

E.S.

I had to join the union in order to do the film. It was catch 22 - spend money to make more money so I could ...

(He begins to pace around the agency walls.)

SPIRIT ONE

She had a child before she died, did she not?

E.S.

Yes, my nephew Fred the actor – good man – spends too much money. Married too early and had a bunch of kids. Tried to tell him about 0 population growth – he didn't listen. She didn't listen. No one seems to listen anymore, have you noticed that?

(Suddenly the front door on the projection screen bursts open and several people enter carrying things for a Christmas party. They lay them out on the tables and desks in the front of the agency and then someone turns up the stereo to "You Ain't Nothin But A Hound Dog" by Elvis Presley. Many of the partiers begin to dance.)

E.S.

Look, it's Eaton Fezzstein and his wife. He owned that agency and always had a great Christmas party – every year until - well – every year. He was always kind to me and –

SPIRIT ONE

And what?

E.S.

Nothing. I mean – I was just trying to say that he always had a good thing to say about someone, not like here in tinsel town where stabbing someone in the back is an everyday occurrence. Just look back at these past Presidential election campaigns if you don't believe me.

(Elgin watches the screen as Fezzstein walks around the room and gives everyone a Christmas envelope that each person opens quickly and yells for joy at the bonus inside. He walks to young Elgin and hands him an envelope and then gives him a big hug. Elgin opens the envelope as Fezzstein crosses to his wife and they start dancing. Elgin removes a stack of bills from the envelope and is stunned by the gift.)

SPIRIT ONE

What is the matter?

E.S.

Nothing. Not a thing. It's just that... Nothing. I just remembered, just now, that Fezzstein did that – I mean – handed out bonuses at the end of the year. I don't understand how I could have forgotten that – advanced something in my old brain I guess.

SPIRIT ONE

Where are you going?

E.S.

To lie down on my lumpy bed because I'm tired of all this madness and for another reason...

SPIRIT ONE

...and does the advanced something in your brain also let you forget how you took over that agency, pushed those good people out and then never looked back?

E.S.

I presume Spirit that you obviously know nothing about the enterprise of business and how it operates in the entertainment capitol of the world. Agencies come and they go at the will of the dollar bill.

SPIRIT ONE

Yes Scroge, I do know about your business practices for I was also one of those clients who you pushed out after you used me up and I was not the only one. Look who else you left behind for a dollar bill and a used suit.

(Suddenly the screen dissolves into the picture of Elgin, a little older now, in a park, walking with a lovely girl his own age towards the screen.)

E.S.

No. No you little pile of sticks. No you don't!! I can't watch this. I won't.

(On the screen the young couple walks toward the audience and then turn off the screen and a moment later they walk in through the front door of the agency.)

E.S.

Please, please Spirit, don't do this right now. I have some very stressful meetings coming up and...

ELGIN

I can't understand why we had to meet right now; I'm running a really big audition for these new kids on the block named... ?

ANN

Elgin, would you let me get a word in please.

ELGIN

Sure. Talk. Please – make it fast.

(She is hurt and sulks away towards the main desk.)

ELGIN

I'm sorry – ah, I guess I'm a little confused - I mean tired – tired and broke really.

ANN

No Elgin, not a little confused, a lot. When we first started dating I thought that this was it. It was all going to happen for me right away, right from the get go.

(She turns and sits on a chair.)

ANN

But – it wasn't and it didn't and now it has to stop.

ELGIN

What are you saying? I missed a couple of dinners and – a whatever, but that doesn't mean anything. I'm working for our future, don't you see that?

ANN

This is our future, right here and now. But now for you is a series of meetings or you have to take a lunch or there's a client who needs help at the airport or you have to take another meeting, pass some more resumes, schmooze some big producer type executives while your girl friend sits in her new dress and doesn't even get the courtesy of a phone call.

ELGIN

This is ridiculous. We have to have some funds to start out in this huge and terrible world that we live in or we'll be poor, in the poor house, on the street corner selling what's left of our lives – for a cheap burger and lousy fries. They want us to pay for the war, do you know that?

E.S.

They still want us to pay for the war. As far as our governmental representatives are concerned, some things never change. Donkey or elephant, makes no difference.



I mean inflation is going to kill us.

(Ann walks away and tries to remove the ring on her finger.)

ANN

Stop it Elgin. You always pull out this phony, 'I'm interested in politics', just when the conversation gets to hot for you to handle. You're not interested in politics and you're not interested in me. You're interested in money and how to keep it and that is the truth. You gave me this phony ring as a gesture, a memento of a time when we were very broke, out of touch with the world but in touch with each other. But we aren't in that world anymore so I can't wear it any longer.

ELGIN

What are you saying Ann?

ANN

I can't compete with the dollar bill or inflation. I'm sorry.

(She moves back to him struggling to get the toy ring off her finger.)

ANN

Darn thing is stuck.

(He moves closer to help her when she suddenly pulls it off and socks him in the chest. He grabs her hand and they just look at each other for a moment.)

ELGIN

Listen. I know I've been busy, I know I've neglected you and I know you're right when you say I'm running around the agency like a chicken with no head. But, it doesn't mean that I don't have feelings for you or that I wouldn't care if you left because, because Ann - I...

(She hands him the ring and she leaves. Elgin runs after her until he gets to the door and then he stops. He looks at the ring. He watches her for a few moments and then turns and walks to the back office. He tosses the ring in the waste basket. E.S. runs to the waste basket and pulls the ring back out. He looks around the room but its empty. He walks to his bed and sits.)

E.S.

Ann. I just couldn't say the words. I didn't know how to make it better between us because - I wanted to be powerful in Hollywood - so I would - be remembered. I tried to tell you that - I just couldn't say it.

(He looks down at the ring. He hides the ring under the pillow on his bed. He claps his hands again and the lights dim down. He lies back with his upper body partially propped up by pillows.)

E.S

Nobody knows what you have to do to grovel your way up this ladder of entertainment greats. Nobody remembers the good guys anymore because the good guys don't make it in show business. This is a dog eat dog world of no privacy, paparazzi, autograph hunters, collectors, agency scams, out of work stars and an economy that just keeps sinking lower and lower by the hour. Add that to the bedroom exploits of a bunch of twenty year old millionaires and you wonder why I am the only one who gets visited by some actors from the past who think I choked their career. Why me? Why not Bullets Durgom? Its just too much for me – too much.

(He slips down to a sleeping position and snores gently. The snooze alarm goes off next to his bed. His hand shoots over and starts pressing the extra time button but it just gets louder. He finally sits up and turns it off.)

E.S.

What's that sound? Its – its just like – like Leno was in the room.

(He looks over at the flat screen and Jay Leno is saying good night to his audience and the credits begin to roll.)

E.S.

Uh-ho. The end of Leno means...

(He looks around with the covers wrapped around him for protection.)

E.S.

What is wrong in here. It's freezing cold. I knew that heating company didn't know what they were doing. Its fr – freezing in here. I'll call em on Christmas day and make some poor worker come out here and fix it right.

(He waits for a moment)

E.S.

I knew it. Leno is over and no ghost. Hah. I'd have made money in Vegas except that I don't go to Vegas because all they want is your money. Anyway...

(Suddenly there are loud bells ringing some great event into being. The screen turns bright with swirling colors and dashes of sparkling fire as a huge Christmas table comes into focus. Hams, turkeys, bells, wine, cranberries, pies, soup, dishes and silver, drinking glasses, holly, red berries, candles, gold and silver treasure, fruit, cookies, pastries, candy, lollipops, peppermint and in a royal chair, made for a puppet sits the Christmas Spirit Two waving to the audience and throwing Hershey chocolate kisses out towards the agency.)

SPIRIT TWO

Come in dude, take a chair, don't be square, join us on this special night of special nights. You have never seen the likes of me I'll bet.

(The spirit puppet wears a lose fitting, rough made top with green breeches and no shoes. His hair falls down in long curls and he has a fair beard already starting to gray. He

wears silver and gold jewelry, an old red cap that extends up to a ball and then falls slightly over from its weight. An old, empty sword hilt is buckled to his waste and a small bag of gold is tied to the hilt.)

E.S.

Listen, let me say this first – if you’re looking for distribution, with this kind of Art Direction, I could personally guarantee you...

(A huge bell gongs.)

SPIRIT TWO

Silence!! I am the ghost of Christmas present.

(A huge choral single high note of praise.)

SPIRIT TWO

Seen any of my brothers have you? My younger brothers that is - chased the phantom, did you dude?

E.S.

I owned part of that show for awhile – good money but no, I haven’t seen your brothers. Do you have many?

SPIRIT TWO

Two thousand and eight but, enough of my family. Its time Elgin Scroge, time for us to dash out and see the present. Come, touch my robe.

(Elgin stumbles over to the screen and touches the robe of Spirit Two. The lights whirl, the dinner is caught up in a funnel and raises up into the center of the swirling vortex, bells and singers chime in with “Deck The Halls” and then it all goes to black and is silent.)

(The screen lights up again with the sounds of a major shopping center doing business during the busiest season of the year. Elgin watches the screen as time races on past stores selling shoes, clothes, books, music, shop after shop in a large mall goes by as Elgin stares at the shoppers, the sellers, the products and the money.)

(The scene begins to darken and slow down as time moves forward until all the stores are closed and all the shoppers gone except Bob Cricket who walks alone with a number of small bags and packages.)

(The front door of the agency opens and fourteen year old Tina Cricket looks in carefully and then rushes past E.S. towards the back of the house. She carries her ice skates behind her.)

(Just as Tina reaches the back, her mother Sharon Cricket comes out of the back and faces her daughter.)

SHARON

Where have you been young lady and what are you carrying behind your back?

TINA  
Nothing mom.

(She tries to walk to her room but her mother stops her.)

SHARON  
Show!!

(Tina slowly reveals the skates. Her mother sits down in a chair and tries not to cry.)

TINA  
I'm sorry mom.

SHARON  
Tina, how many times have we told you? One fall, one is all it takes and you will never skate again, you'll never walk again without crutches. I'm sorry but you have to make yourself understand what I'm telling you. When you fell you hit your tailbone so hard you compressed...

TINA  
..... three discs in my lower back, L-3, L-4 and L-5, I know all that mom.

SHARON  
...but what you seem to forget Tina is that you also fractured them in such a way that if you hit that spot one more time...

TINA  
...I get it mom. I didn't race, I just – I just...

SHARON  
...I know it was cruel and God should be punished for it – at the high point of your career – but you'll never have a career again Tina unless...

TINA  
... we can afford an operation that will fix that part of me that's broken?  
One day when we can afford it? One day when we win the lottery or one day when dad's stinking boss gives him a raise except that one day just never comes, does it mom? Does it?

(Tina runs out of the room.)

SHARON  
But God let you walk and that is the miracle here and I can't forget it. Please don't let me forget - that she could be crippled – for good.

(She walks out the front.)

E.S.  
I – I really didn't have any idea. Bob never really talks about her in the agency. He just works – hard and doesn't say much. Tell me – a little more about her.

(The Spirit waves his hand at the screen and suddenly there is Tina – ice skating in a National Championship. She is extraordinary.)

E.S.

I always knew I should have been a Sports Agent, that's really where the money is now you know. And you, you could make a fortune. I mean – a Spirit that talks, walks, probably sings and dances right? You could be SAG, AEA, AFTRA.

SPIRIT TWO

If she falls - if she is hit hard enough by some object – she would spend the remainder of her days in a wheel chair.

E.S.

Is there nothing that can be done?

SPIRIT TWO

There is an operation that would cure her from the fall she took on the ice.

E.S.

Probably as expensive as hell right? And of course Cricket doesn't have that kind of insurance, I know...

SPIRIT TWO

Yes, you do know. You are the one who wouldn't pay the little extra it would have taken to make him more prepared for medical emergencies.

E.S.

Yes, well – as much as thirty percent of this nation is not covered properly with health insurance and I hope you don't think I should be the one to take care of all of those poor people.

SPIRIT TWO

Of course not. Only the rich should worry about our surplus population of poor and uninsured people.

(Bob Cricket comes in the front door with Sharon and walks to the table and puts down his packages.)

BOB

I can't wait to show you the great stuff, most for more than fifty percent off. And... what's wrong? Were you waiting for me out there?

SHARON

Tina was ice skating.

BOB

Is she all right? Did she fall?

SHARON

She didn't fall but she just doesn't understand how dangerous it is. She doesn't understand how we can't afford to help her.

BOB

I know its true but you have to remember she's only fourteen years old and...

SHARON

...she's already been on television, already been on the radio, already been asked to skate in a motion picture, and...

BOB

...she is still only fourteen years old and this is all so new and terrible for her life.

(He walks to her and holds her from behind.)

BOB

Sharon Cricket, we have an incredible family, an incredible set of friends who are, at this moment, out in the streets with posters asking for donations to help Tina Cricket – one time California State Ice Skating Champion. Our younger son and daughter have sat behind a lemonade stand for a year now, raising money for this operation. No one, and I mean no one, is more broke than we are but – we have hope and we know that hope has worked in the past. We just have to hang on until the pendulum starts to swing in the other direction.

SHARON

Our house has lost so much equity, what are we going to do if the housing market doesn't turn around? Its all we have.

BOB

I – I- don't know what we would do.

SHARON

Can't you ask him for help. Tell him our problem and ask his advice.

E.S.

Probably got into one of those sub-prime loans that's taking the county down. Another Country Wide lending massacre and of course now the government wants to bail them out and of course we'll all pay for it in the end, as usual.

SPIRIT TWO

Country Wide is just another lender making money just like you.

E.S.

How I make my money is none of your business stick man, but I can tell you that if you had owned some of those loans you might have been better off...

SPIRIT TWO

...at my death?

E.S.

Listen, this is all so much humbug! This poor man and his wife and family

got this way because they tried to live the American Dream and that was when people knew who Edward Albee was. The Cricket's don't have anything but hope. Hope? What is that word? What does it even mean? Hope from whom? The God of Christmas, the God of joy and happiness, the God of 'he who pays your rent when you don't have the money' is that the one? The God of my Murphy bed in which I sleep because the cost of a Studio apartment has gone straight into insanity?