



Pantoscripts Perusal

Ebenezer Scroggie

by Stephen Yarnall

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Panto Scripts

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CHARACTERS

CHRISTMAS GONE	Male or Female
CHRISTMAS PRESENT	Male or Female
CHRISTMAS FUTURE	Male
JACOB MEASLY	Male
CAROL SINGERS	Any number, male, female, children
BOY 1	Male
URIAH HEAP	Male could double as Fred Scroggie house guest, passer by or business man
BOB CATCHIT	Male
EBENEZER SCROGGIE	Male
EMILY CATCHIT	(Bob Catchit's wife) Female
NORMA STITZ	Male
IRMA MANN	Male
FRED SCROGGIE	Male
BEN DOVER	Schoolboy could double as carol singer
YOUNG EBENEZER	Schoolboy could double as carol singer
YOUNG MEASLY	Schoolboy could double as carol singer
CHURCHMOUSE	Schoolboy could double as carol singer
FANNY SCROGGIE	Schoolgirl could double as carol singer
YOUNG MOLLY MEASLY	Female
FRED SCROGGIE LUNCH GUEST	Male (non speaking) could double as Uriah Heap, carol singer or passer by
FRED SCROGGIE LUNCH GUEST	Male (non speaking) could double as carol singer
FEED SCROGGIE LUNCH GUEST	Female (non speaking) could double as carol singer
MARTHA CATCHIT	(Catchit's daughter) Female
VICTORIA CATCHIT	(Catchit's daughter) Female
TEENY TOM	(Catchit's disabled son) Boy
MOLLY MEASLY	Female
PASSER BY 1	Male or Female
PASSER BY 2	Male or Female
BUSINESS MAN 1	Male
BUSINESS MAN 2	Male

EBENEZER SCROGGIE

A Christmas Caper

by Steve Yarnall

SCENE ONE

A single set. There is access to stage left and right from the auditorium via steps (from the 'street'). Upstage right is Scroggie's office/living space. Downstage right is his bedroom accessed from CS and USR via imaginary door(s) and auditorium. It has a small four poster tester bed with functioning curtains.

CSR above the bed is a desk with two chairs, one each side and a battered old armchair.

USC and USL are two tables with chairs or benches on either side.

DSL is Bob Catchit's (BOB) office with tall Victorian work desk and an entrance door with shop doorbell on a spring. The cast ring this as they enter, unless otherwise directed.

A sign hangs on the leading edge of the desk reading Scroggie and Measley with the strap line 'We'll look after your money' The word Measley is crossed out but still visible.

There is a backdrop of a silhouette London skyline maybe with some windows in which lights occasionally flicker?

CURTAIN UP to reveal three 'ghosts' at Scroggie's desk, Christmas Gone (Gone), Christmas Present (Present) and Christmas Future (Future). Gone is looking bored with a basin and spoon in front of him. Present is reading the Financial Times and Future wearing a built up costume, is huge dressed all in black with face covered and sits silently looking threatening.

GONE When shall we three meet again in thunder lightning or in rain? When the hurly burly's done, same day next week about half past one.

PRESENT Mr. G. Please! I'm trying to check our investments. They're nearly worthless. They've hardly recovered from the South Sea Bubble and Rachel Reeves taxes. We're on the edge of financial ruin unless things pick up pretty quickly.
(Gone starts humming and drumming his fingers. After a while he starts stirring the contents of the basin.)

GONE Eye of newt and toe of frog, half a cat (*FX cat miaow*) and tongue of dog, adder's fork and blind worm's sting. Well, that's lunch ready.

PRESENT Must you do that? It smells revolting!

GONE I'll have you know it's an old family recipe.

PRESENT Well you didn't find it in Mary Berry's Cookbook, that's for sure! You've got basins full of it in the fridge already!

GONE Well it keeps!

PRESENT Yes, it keeps, keeps trying to escape!
(Gone sighs and takes out a pack of cards and starts playing snap, by himself.)

GONE Snap!

PRESENT *(Moans loudly)*

GONE Snap!

PRESENT *(angry)* Will you stop doing that. You can't play snap by yourself!

GONE *(Dealing rapidly)* Yes you can – snap, snap snap *(louder)* SNAP! See.

PRESENT *(Shouting)* No you can't! and anyway it's getting on my nerves!
(Long pause. Gone starts whistling.)

GONE Double, double toil and trouble.

PRESENT Oh for goodness sake Mr. G. do you have to!?

GONE Well, Old Bill did write some good stuff you know. Better than that other bloke. What the Dickens was his name? Anyway I'm bored. Bored, bored, bored!

PRESENT Thank you Mr. G. We all feel the same. Times are certainly quiet here at Scarem Witless. I've never known anything like it since we started. It's Christmas Eve, a perfect time for visitations; but we've no bookings, not one!

GONE Yeh, I bet that Father Christmas and his snotty nosed reindeer and have got all the time slots by now!

PRESENT True enough. But you'd think someone, somewhere would want to put the frighteners on somebody. I mean it is Christmas and all that.
(Measly enters SL. not through the door. He is dressed in chains, a burial cloth is tied under his chin.)

GONE By the pricking of my thumbs. Something wicked this way comes...

PRESENT *(furious)* Mr G this is the last time....

GONE *(interrupting)* No, no there's somebody here. Look. *(points)*

PRESENT Quick look busy!

(GONE starts to collect the cards – drops most of them on the floor).
(PRESENT grabs The Financial Times and begins reading it upside down).

MEASLY *(Speaks with difficulty because of the bandages. He is a cockney)* Oh woe, woe, woe is me. Thrice times woe. Alas alack. Woe is me.

PRESENT Good afternoon Mr Woe. Do come in.
(Measly struggles slowly forward due to the weight of the chains)

GONE *(sings quietly)* Any old iron, any old iron.

PRESENT (*aside*) Mr G if you don't mind. Welcome to Scarem Witless Mr Woe, nocturnal missions our speciality. How can we be of service to you?

MEASLY (*mumbling indistinctly*) I'd like you to visit an old friend of mine.

GONE Maybe he's a ventriloquist. A gottle of gear. Getty Gotter gought some gutter.

PRESENT Thank you Mr G.

MEASLY (*removes burial cloth*) I'd like you to ...er... visit an old friend of mine in the world beyond. (*looking round – furtively*). You are the people who (*pause*) sort of, sort people out in the middle of the night ain't ya?

PRESENT Yes that's right Mr. Woe. Do take a seat (*seeing the chains*) well maybe not. We at Scarem Witless offer the perfect Christmas present for that 'difficult to buy for person'. We are proud of our record.

GONE It's a sort of travel insurance to prepare them for the journey to that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns. (*gets a look from Present*).

MEASLY Nah, not Budleigh Salterton! (*insert local town*). That's no good.

PRESENT Many's the client who has been persuaded to change his way of life by just one visit from Scarem Witless.

MEASLY I don't want 'im to change his life. I wants 'im to lose it! You know – sort 'im out!

PRESENT Ah yes well, maybe that's not quite...

GONE (*interrupting*) Mr P, Mr P, a word if I may. (*whispers*). You said yourself we've got no appointments and we're facing financial difficulties. It's very late on Christmas Eve. We're not likely to get anyone else now.

PRESENT But we only scare people Mr G. We don't 'do em in' as he might say.

GONE I know, I know but think about it. No work means no bonus this Christmas and anyway who's to say that if we do our job really well we might well...er... just accidentally ...erm, lose a client. If you get my drift.

PRESENT Thank you Mr G that's a very interesting point you raise. Sorry about that Mr. Woe, do go on.

MEASLY Well my name is, was, Jacob Measley and I was in partnership with one Ebenezer Scroggie.

GONE And you'd like him to change his ways?

MEASLY Not exactly change his ways. More like change 'im.

PRESENT Ah yes. And why would that be?

MEASLY Well, as I said we was in business together and we made a decent livin'. Then I pops me clogs and I end up in in this Netherworld. It ain't exactly a bed of roses!

GONE You can say that again.

MEASLY And anyway when I passed over my will said that my remaining assets should go to my daughter Molly but that cheatin' so-and-so did 'er out of every penny.

PRESENT Oh. Yes well that's a difficult one.

GONE (*Coughs*) I'm sure we can teach him the error of his ways

MEASLY So what is it exactly that you do?

PRESENT Perhaps you would enlighten our client Mr G?

GONE Yes, well we offer three levels of service. First there's our ooh level. Then there's our argh level. And our third level is so new we haven't got a name for yet.

MEASLY (*frustrated*) So what do you actually do? 'Urry up I've many miles still to go in these 'ere chains

GONE Our ooh level is our basic level of service and it involves yours truly popping round just after they've dropped off and I take him or her on a magic trip to their past to when they were growing up. I show the things that affected them while they were growing up and contributed to their current self worth or lack of it. (JM yawns, bored) We often find, like Prince Harry there's more than enough stuff to justify the er victim's take on life!

MEASLY But does it work? It don't sound very frightening!

PRESENT Well in that case, there's our argh level.

MEASLY Yeees?

PRESENT After Mr G has done his work, I give the client just enough time to go back to sleep then I wake them again and whisk them through the night to see what their friends and acquaintances really think of them and how their actions affect others in the world around them. That's a real eye opener sometimes I can tell you.

GONE (*Scots accent*) Oh would some power the gift he gi'e us. To see ourselves as others see us.

PRESENT Mr G, if you don't mind!

MEASLY (*frustrated*) But Scroggie's a sociopath, he don't give a toss about nobody or anyfin' else! (*sighs*) No, I'm sorry but there doesn't seem anything suitable here I'm wasting my time and yours.

PRESENT Wait a minute, wait a minute Mr Measley you haven't heard about our latest top of the range service – so new we haven't got a name for it yet. (*pause for effect*). After they've been softened up by Mr G here and myself there's our coup de grace, tour de force, piece de resistance and ...er... well there must be another suitable French phrase. (*points to Christmas Future (CF)*). All stare at him. He doesn't react.

MEASLY Nah! If you don't mind me sayin' He ain't exactly fright..
(*Turns to go. Blackout, SFX loud clap of thunder. CF rises, he is huge and frightening.*)
Merde! (*holding his chest as though in utter shock*)

PRESENT Yes! That's the one! That's a great name.

MEASLY (*gasping*) He'll do! Can he start tonight?

GONE (*whips out a contract*) Good choice Mr. Measley. I'm sure you'll be very pleased.

PRESENT Just sign here and here. Cash only I'm afraid. (*Measly hands over a bag of cash*). Perfect. Thank you. Now, The name and address of the vict. ...er... client, client?

MEASLY Ebenezer Scroggie of 13 Cheapside, very Cheapside (*walks Measly to the door DSL*)

PRESENT Leave it with us Mr Measly we'll report back to you as soon as the operation is over. Now mind that wa... (*Measly leaves, walking 'through' the wall. PRESENT returns to his desk*)

PRESENT His file, if you would be so kind Mr G.

(*GONE exits and returns with huge bundle of papers and/or files. Drops them on the desk and clouds of dust arise.*)

GONE Wow! that's some record.

(*All three start to peruse the files*)

PRESENT That's the biggest I've ever seen! (*as they start opening pages at random.*) Extortion, usury, financial malpractice, fraud, slave trafficking, perverting the course of justice, intimidation of witnesses, wearing multi- coloured socks, non-payment of income tax. So he's not all bad then! Did he do all this? Well I never. How did he get away with it? Oh My goodness. What a miserable old devil! (*etc, etc*)

GONE He can't be that bad surely?

FADE STAGE LIGHTS.

SCENE TWO

Carollers dressed as urchins, enter darkened auditorium singing 'God rest ye merry gentlemen'. One is holding a light on a stick that throws a downward light beam. Occasionally as they walk towards the stage one of the carollers throws fake snow into the beam to suggest snow falling. A small boy follows carrying a Guy Fawkes. He sits against the wall a little away from the carollers. SCROGGIE enters and follows them.

BOY1 *(sits shouting)* Penny for the guy sir! Penny for the guy!

SCROGGIE *(passes, stops and turns back to the boy).* What did you say?

BOY1 Penny for the guy, sir

SCROGGIE *(taking out a large bag of money)* You stupid boy! *(weeding)* How much would you like? A penny? *(boy nods vigorously)* Ahh. Is that all? How about half a crown? *(boy nods more keenly)* *(temptingly)* What about a whole crown

BOY1 Oh wow! A whole crown? Yes sir, please sir!

SCROGGIE A crown it is then. Just bend your head and I'll crown you. You gullible little twit!
(Hits boy over the head who starts to wail. He picks up his guy and runs offstage)

BOY1 *(yelling)* Mom, mom that nasty man just hit me!

(Scroggie passes the carollers who are below the stage.)

SINGER 1 A merry Christmas sir!

SCROGGIE Bah humbug!

(A caroller shakes a collecting tin at SCROGGIE who takes it hand walks on.)

SINGER2 No, no that's not the way it's meant to work!

SCROGGIE You offered it to me did you not?

SINGER2 Yes, but for you to put some money in not take it.

SCROGGIE Me! Give you money?

SINGER1 Yes, it's for the poor and the needy.

SCROGGIE Send them to the workhouse then.

SINGER2 Many would rather die than go into the workhouse, sir.

SCROGGIE Well, let them die and be quick about it; reduce the surplus population, help with climate control. I thought you lot were all for that sort of thing – glueing yourselves to railings, throwing paint at paintings, scaring horses and the like.

SINGER1 How can you say such a thing.

SCROGGIE It's easy! I just open my mouth like this and say (*emphatically and loudly*) let them die! A good day to you! And you can stop that caterwauling or I'll call the Bow Street Runners. It's getting on my nerves! Have you got a licence for carol singing in a built-up area?

SINGER1 No sir.

SCROGGIE Well you'd better get one and be quick about it! And what are this lot doing here?. (*indicates the audience*)

SINGER2 They've paid to watch sir.

SCROGGIE Paid money to watch this lot! (*stares at the audience. Shaking his head*) I don't believe it! Must have more money than sense. Haven't you got a home to got to? Probably, most of you look as though you've just been let out of one for the evening.

(*walks on to his quarters DSR*)

(Some of the carollers start to cry and are comforted by others. Others stare after him and shake their fists calling 'Meanie, Old Skinflint and What a nasty man'.)

SCENE THREE

During scene two BOB has entered and started to work DSL. His top hat is upside down on his desk. There is a meagre fire to which he occasionally extends his hands. With a scarf around his neck he works away occasionally blowing into his fingers. (maybe when he first dips his quill into the ink it could come out 'frozen?')

SCROGGIE goes into his quarters and sits at his desk. Empties the collecting tin.

SCROGGIE (*rubbing hands together*) Well, my first deal of the day! I think this is going to be a good one. Straight out of the Donald Trump play book. (*finds buttons*) Buttons? Buttons! Some people are so mean!

(URIAH HEAP (HEAP) enters the office holding onto the bell but SCROGGIE hears and is alert.

HEAP (*quietly and warily*) Mornin' Mr Catchit. E's not around is he?

BOB (*finger to lips and indicating. Whispers*) Good morning Mr Heap. How are you and all the little Heaps?

HEAP I'm alright sir. But 'umbly speaking Mr Catchit it's like this. I 'er, I 'erm gunna be a bit late again this month. I've 'ad what you might call a few complications, hunexpected hout goings so to speak.

BOB But you know what he said last time. One more late payment and you're out.

HEAP I know I know. But I can't be hevicted. I mean somebody's gotta look after the little 'uns ain't they? Please Mr Catchit, do what you can. Take pity on an 'umble fella. Give me a week say and I'll get fings sorted. (*scuttles out. Rings bell*)

SCROGGIE CATCHIT! Who was that? I hope it wasn't that waste of space Heap, again! You know what I said last month. If he's late this time he's got to go – no question!

BOB No sir, Yes sir, yes sir. I understand sir.

SCROGGIE Well?

BOB (*desperately*) No sir er, it's not that this time sir. (*trying to make something up*) It's er, he erm, says (*light bulb moment*) he's had a stroke of er good fortune and he will er pay (*under his breath*) eventually.

SCROGGIE A stroke of good fortune eh? Right. (*BOB much relieved, smiles broadly*) So, if he's had a stroke of good fortune he can afford to pay more can't he? Up his rent by 25% starting next week. (*BOB collapses and bangs his head on the desk in frustration*) And, while you're at it I've got several more eviction notices here that need serving

BOB Surely not at Christmas Mr Scroggie?

SCROGGIE Why not? What's Christmas but a time for paying bills with no money and being a year older and not an hour richer. Now I've got one here for Nellie Trent.

BOB What the Old Curiosity shop?

SCROGGIE What a waste of time that is? I mean who wants an Old Curiosity anyway? We've got loads here that nobody wants (*indicates the audience. continues reading notices*) Mr O. Twist?

BOB It's only a small amount sir.

SCROGGIE Probably overspent. He was always wanting more! Dick Swiveller? Yes. Well the less said about him the better. What about Silas Marner?

BOB He's not on our books any more he's gone over to George Elliot's.

SCROGGIE Oh him or her or whatever, they're welcome. He's a right Mary Anne that one. Right Catchit I'm off to the bank. Keep at it and don't forget those evictions.

(exits DSR)

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SCENE FOUR

(Carollers sing 'Jingle Bells' Catchit's wife Emily (EMILY) enters through shop door DSL)

- EMILY** Is he in? (BC in panic tries to usher her out of the door)
- BOB** No my dear, he's gone to the bank. What are you doing here? You know he doesn't allow social calls during office hours.
- EMILY** Hah! Yet more money! As if he hasn't got enough already! Shame, I was about to give him a piece of my mind.
- BOB** (quietly) Not too much my dear you haven't got a lot.
- EMILY** What was that?
- BOB** Nothing my angel, nothing.
- EMILY** Have you asked him about tomorrow yet?
- BOB** No, not yet sweetheart.
- EMILY** I thought not. You go through this every year. Are you a man or a mouse? Ask him! Everyone else gets Christmas Day off. Why not you? He works you hard enough the rest of the year.
- BOB** I will ask him, when he gets back.
- EMILY** And while you are about it you can tell that miserable, old penny pinching, money grubbing so and so that you want a raise in your pay. You still earn the same as you did ten years ago! It's chicken feed! And talking of feeding chickens I've just been shopping for tomorrow and this is all I could afford (holds up a rubber chicken) with the pathetic amount of housekeeping you give me!
- BOB** Well we still have the house that he found for us.
- EMILY** House? HOUSE? You call that a house? It's falling down around our ears! It's so damp it's like living under a waterfall. Teeny Tom's crutch has got rising damp and even the mice have umbrellas! Tom's awake every night cough, cough, coughing. And of course you don't hear him snoring away like a warthog. He needs to go to the doctors but on your pay we can't even afford cough sweets. Do you know when we first moved in I thought we had green wallpaper until I discovered the walls were covered in mould!
- BOB** No you're right we can't afford a doctor dear. You know that. And anyway they'd probably all be on strike, like everyone else.
- EMILY** And look at this fire, it's brass monkeys outside. This wouldn't melt a snowflake.

(she goes to scuttle and picks up a piece of coal)

BOB Argh! Don't put that coal on the fire! He'll notice. He counts every lump.
(spots SCROGGIE returning) Quick, quick out he's coming back.

EMILY Don't forget, our Martha's back this afternoon. Even she gets Christmas day off. So don't be late.

(Gives BOB the lump of coal he drops it into his hat as she exits)

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SCENE FIVE

Carollers sing 'The First Nowell'.

SCROGGIE returns to his quarters via the 'street door' as BOB goes to return the small piece of coal. Panicking he drops the coal into his top hat and sits at his desk. SCROGGIE goes to his officer desk perusing his bank statement.

Door bell rings as two 'ladies' enter. Norma Stitz (NORMA) and Irma Mann (IRMA) and seductively approach BOB

BOB Good afternoon er, ladies.

NORMA (*seductively*) Good afternoon young man.

IRMA Yes, good afternoon young man. Isn't he absolutely gorgeous?

NORMA Oh yes absolutely.

BOB Is there anything I can do for you ladies?

NORMA Well there is certainly something you could do for me.

IRMA And the same for me too when you've finished, if you would be so kind. (*stroking his face*) But it's so cold in here your nose is colder than a penguin's willy!

NORMA Well you would know dear!

BOB I don't think birds have willies.

(*NORMA and IRMA exchange knowing glances*)

NORMA You obviously don't know us well enough... Yet!

IRMA Yes, you have to look closely.

NORMA (*cattily*) In your case very closely!

IRMA Bitch! (*They stand either side of him, stroking his face, their ample bosoms enclosing his head*) Is that better?

NORMA Isn't he just gorgeous?

BOB Sorry ladies. I can't hear you. Do I know you?

IRMA Did you hear that Norma? He must be a gentleman he called us ladies!

NORMA Yes we would like to get to know you a little better Mr. er, Mr. er (*dashes round the front of his desk to check the name*) Mr. Scroggie.

BOB Oh I'm not Mr. Scroggie. He's my boss. I'm his clerk.

IRMA (*Dismissively*) Clerk? Clerk? We don't deal with clerks! We need to go much higher. Don't we dear?

NORMA (*high pitched*) Yes, much higher! (*Normal voice*) And where pray might we find the aforementioned Mr Scroggie?

BOB He's in his quarters. But I don't think he'll be able to see you just now. He's not seeing anyone at the mome....

NORMA Where are his quarters? Through here?

(*The ladies charge into SCROGGIE'S quarters. He tries to stand but NORMA pushes him back into his chair.*)

IRMA Do we have the honour of addressing Mr Ebenezer Scraggie the owner of this er. magnificent edifice?

SCROGGIE It's Scroggie!

IRMA It *certainly* is.

NORMA (*approaching SCROGGIE as with BOB. Gets close and makes to stroke him but stops short*) Oh isn't he absolutely...gor...er.

IRMA Yes you're not wrong there.

SCROGGIE Who are you and what do you want? You look like the Elephant Man's ugly sisters!

NORMA My name is Norma, Norma Stitz and this is.... (*indicates*)

IRMA Irma Mann.

SCROGGIE (*stares*) Yes, I can see that!

NORMA We are here with a business proposition for you Mr Scraggie

SCROGGIE Scroggie. (*interested*) Go ahead. I'm all ears!

IRMA Well Norma and I are looking to build a new orphanage (*SCROGGIE screws up his face*) Mr Soggie.

SCROGGIE Scroggie! (*smarmy*) And you'd like borrow money? Well you've certainly come to the right place. Please do take a seat. Excuse me while I start my timer. Don't worry you get the first sixty seconds of my advice absolutely free; but, time is money after all. (*turns over egg timer*) My rates are very competitive; bank rate plus (*coughs*) per cent repayable over (*coughs*) years. (*whips out a contract from his desk. Offers a quill*) Just sign here, here and here. Please ignore that last clause, Jacob Measly doesn't work here any longer and it's cash only I'm afraid.

NORMA (*laughing*) Oh no Mr. Sickie. You don't understand.

SCROGGIE Scroggie!

NORMA (*laughing*) You've got quite the wrong end of the stick I'm afraid. (*cattily*) That often happens to Irma doesn't it dear? (*she glowers back*). No, no, we would like you to donate some money to the cost of building the orphanage. Can you imagine the sign above the door? The Scroppie Home for Poor Orphans!

SCROGGIE You didn't say (*gasping*) donate did you? I'm sure I heard you say donate. (*collapses back into chair, thumps his chest*) Keep going, keep going!

IRMA (*fanning him with her handbag which hits SCROGGIE*) Are you alright? Are you all right? I think you should give him mouth to mouth dear.

NORMA No, no after you my dear.

IRMA No, no, you've had the training dear.

NORMA (*takes a deep breath*) Right, stand aside.

(*Sits on SCROGGIE'S lap facing him puckers as if to give him mouth to mouth*)

SCROGGIE (*sits up suddenly*) That won't be necessary. I'm afraid there's been something of a misunderstanding ladies. I thought someone suggested that I give YOU money!

IRMA That's right dear any amount will do no matter how small.

SCROGGIE Let me make this perfectly clear I DO NOT, under ANY circumstances DONATE to anybody or anything and certainly not to two, two, of the ugliest 'ladies' I've seen since our last pantomime. Is that clear? And if you do find anyone gullible enough to give you money then let me know and I'll pay them a visit myself – I'm sure I could look as good as you two! (*preens and poses*)

IRMA Absolutely Mr Scargill.

SCROGGIE Scroggie!

NORMA But there are so many orphan children in the city.

SCROGGIE Nothing to do with me I can assure you! Now if you don't mind. I have some work to do in order to EARN some money.

IRMA I think you're being very mean Mr Saggie.

SCROGGIE SCROGGIE!

NORMA Come Irma dear it's obvious we are not welcome here. Good day Mr Scroggie

SCRAGGIE SCRAGGIE! (*realises*)....Oh bother!

(The ladies exit passing BOB)

IRMA Well I never!

NORMA I'm sure you must have dear, you've certainly tried hard enough! (*Irma swings handbag but misses*)

IRMA What a thoroughly nasty person. (*BOB nods in agreement*)

NORMA I don't know how you put up with it Mr Scratchit

BOB Catchit!

IRMA If I were you I'd find another position. (*Seductively*) Preferably with me. Do you, know he wouldn't give us a penny Mr Catnip! (*IRMA returns to BOB and begins to stroke his cheek again*) You're not a bit like him. In fact you're....

NORMA Norma!

Ladies exit as Fred Scroggie (FRED) enters. He is the epitome of a 'fun' Christmas. Garish Christmas pullover underneath his frock coat and has many Christmas jokes and novelties as possible – e.g. flashing/rotating bow tie, light up Santa Claus, paper or Top hat with a lid that raises up etc.

He is drunk, swaying slightly, the ladies pin him against the wall and threateningly shake their collecting tin at him. He finds this very funny and shakes their tin back at them. NORMA grabs him by the collar. He reluctantly deposits some small cash. The ladies look at each other, smiles fade. They shake their heads and tin and turn again to FRED who puts in more change. This time they take him by the lapels and lift him off the floor before FRED finally takes out his wallet and 'donates' an old £5 note.

IRMA (*simpering*) What a nice man. (*Pinches FRED'S cheek*)

NORMA Irma!

(Ladies exit)

FRED (*letting off a party popper*) Phew that was a close shave!

BOB Yes they could both do with one!

FRED The condiments of the season to you young Bob how are you?

BOB Well, thank you Mr. Fred. and the compliments of the season to you.

FRED And the family?

BOB They're all well thank you Mr Fred and looking forward to Christmas.

FRED I bet young Teeny Tom is excited. How is he these days?

BOB He does well Mr Fred thank you, but he does get rather tired.

FRED Don't we all? Aah. Oh well into the lion's den. Is he in?

BOB Yes. And the best of luck.

FRED (*Staggers towards SCROGGIE'S quarters*) Well I did drop into the Spaniards for a drop of Dutch courage. I had a double Scotch, an Irish coffee, a Moscow Mule and a Manhattan. It's amazing how cosmo, cosmopol, cosmopol er cool London is getting these days.

(Enters SCROGGIE'S room without knocking. He is counting money).

SCROGGIE (*without looking up*) OUT! CATCHIT! I thought I told you NO MORE VISITORS! Oh, it's you again. My waste of space nephew, reeking of the alehouse as usual. No doubt you've wasted the morning cavorting with those degenerate wastrels in The Swan (*or other local pub*) You were here last Christmas, and the one before and the one before that! Can't you take no for an answer? You look like the first bin collection after Christmas. I've never seen such an awful sight. No, that's not right you were even worse last year dressed as some sort of scarlet nosed reindeer! What do you want, as if I didn't know?

FRED I came to wish you Merry Christmas uncle and to invite you to lunch tomorrow.

SCROGGIE Christmas, sir? Bah humbug! And as for lunch, do you think I'm some sort of masochist and would risk my health partaking of your wife's cuisine? Assuming that good for nothing, useless lump of lard stillcooks? The one and only time I ever ventured to dine with you she asked me how many slices of gravy I wanted!

FRED Ah, well she's been having lessons she's now a Cordon Bleu!

SCROGGIE Cordon Bleu? Cordon Bleu? She should be cordoned off! I suppose the sprouts have been simmering since November, and the pudding is like a cannonball. Uh! Every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a sprig of holly stuck in his posterior!

FRED You don't mean that uncle.

SCROGGIE I most certainly do. Good day to you sir!

FRED Well dear uncle we will lay a place for you at lunch tomorrow – as we always do, if you do change your mind for whatever reason you will be most welcome. Good day uncle and the condiments of the season to you.

(SCROGGIE is unmoved. FRED closes the door and turning blows his party blower it fails and dangles limply.)

FRED Phew, that went well!

BOB Same procedure as last year eh Mr Fred?

FRED Same procedure as every year Bob. Well, I'll wish you and yours the happiest of Christmases despite what you have to put up with.

(kisses him on the head and exits).

(BOB continues to work until the clock begins to strike six o'clock. At the first note rings he gets up and begins to put on his hat, scarf and gloves.)

SCROGGIE CATCHIT!

(BOB hurriedly returns to his desk and continues working until the chiming has completely finished then he gets up and blows out his candle.)

(SCROGGIE walks as far as his 'door')

SCROGGIE I suppose you'll be wanting the whole day off tomorrow?

BOB Well yes sir if it's convenient.

SCROGGIE *(mimicking)* Yes sir, if it's convenient! And what if it's not convenient?

BOB Well, it is traditional sir.

SCROGGIE So was throwing Christians to the lions but I don't suppose you'd want to keep that tradition going would you?

BOB No sir.

SCROGGIE *(sighing)* And if I were to stop you half a crown for the day off you'd think yourself ill used I'll be bound. Yet you don't think me ill used for paying you a day's wages for no work!

BOB It's only once a year sir.

SCROGGIE That's a poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every 25th December. *(pause)* Well, be here one hour earlier every day for the next week to make up your time.

BOB Thank you indeed Mr Scroggie. And a merry Christmas to you too.

(Goes to exit and puts on his scarf and hat. The coal falls out)

SCROGGIE What's this? What's this! Stealing coal now are we?

BOB No sir, no sir. It's....

SCROGGIE So, it's not enough that I pay you and find you a house. What do you do? You steal my coal! That coal is mine, you are the pits. Do you know that? You expect me to cut you some slack and give you the day off tomorrow. I don't know about slack – I should give you the sack I don't have to keep you warm. I only do that out of the goodness of my heart. I've been shafted! I hope you burn in hell for this. If it wasn't so late on Christmas Eve I'd fire you on the spot. Just you wait until that day after tomorrow. We'll sort this out then. Good day to you sir.

BOB *(sadly)* A merry Christmas to you sir.

SCROGGIE Bah humbug!

(SCROGGIE growls. Follows BOB to the door and closes it. He shuffles around and exits into his quarters SR)

(Carollers sing 'In the bleak midwinter')

INTERVAL

SCENE SIX

SCROGGIE enters. He wears his fingerless gloves, an old moth eaten dressing gown under which is a night shirt. He carries a bowl of gruel and a spoon. Sits and noisily slurps his supper.

MEASLY (entering 'through' the wall) Oh woe, woe is me!

SCROGGIE (mid slurp. Angrily) Who are you? What do you want and how did you get here?

MEASLY Slow down Eb. One question at a time. Ya don't remember me do ya?

SCROGGIE I don't know anybody who still wears chains. I thought punk fashion went out years ago.

MEASLY Why don't ya ask me who I was?

SCROGGIE Alright. Who was ya? I mean who were you?

MEASLY I, was Jacob Measly, your old partner.

SCROGGIE Never (peers myopically) So it is. (OTT friendly) Jakey old chap how are you? What are you doing here and where have you come from? (MEASLY points to the ground) Not Australia? Don't say they caught up with you at last. Oh eck. I suppose they'll be after me next Jakey.

MEASLY Don't you Jakey me you conniving old sod. You cheated my sister Molly out of 'er inheritance and I means to get it back.

SCROGGIE (innocent) Me? cheated your sister? Oh come on Jakey you know that's not quite true.

MEASLY Not quite true? Not quite true? Ha! When I died I left half of my share of the business, this business, to 'er and you cheated 'er out of it.

SCROGGIE No I didn't. I invested it for her. You know as well as I do my old friend that shares 'can go up as well as down and you may not get back the full amount of your investment'. You said that often enough when we were working together. I invested it for her in a hedge fund. I didn't know that the price of trees was going to fall so much.

MEASLY You cheating old git! My time here is short so I'll just say that you 'ad better watch out tonight! I've got three friends who are gonna pay you a visit and sort you out good and proper!

SCROGGIE No, No Jakey please not the Kray Triplets please. I know we used them but you wouldn't let them loose on your old friend now would you?

MEASLY Nah, nah. (*SCROGGIE is relieved*) Not them – oh no, these are worse, much worse. (*cackling laugh*). Goodbye Ebenezer. I'll wish you a 'appy Christmas – if you survive 'til then! (*exits cackling*)

SCROGGIE Oh heck. (pause) I must be dreaming. That couldn't have been him, could it? It must be something I ate. Any little thing can set you off. Undigested cheese, a bit of a take away curry, some old jellied eels and that gruel was well past its sell by date. No, there's more of the gravy than the grave about him, whatever he was. (*yawns*).

(*ES clears his stuff away and exits*)

(*Carollers sing 'Silent Night'*)

(*SCROGGIE returns and collects his chamber pot from under the bed and exits*)

(*SFX we hear the sound of SCROGGIE having a wee into his chamber pot. It's a very long wee with SCROGGIE humming satisfactorily to himself. Sound stops then starts again, stops and is followed by a pause and then the sound of three or four last drops. SCROGGIE sighs contentedly. He returns carrying his teddy and a candle. He is wearing a football supporter's hat. Teddy bear wears shorts/trousers. Gets into bed and draws the curtains around the bed*)

PantoScripts Perusal

SCENE SEVEN

Church clock begins to chime 12 o'clock.

SCROGGIE *(slowly getting into bed)* Night, night Ted. You'll look after me won't you? You're my bestest friend in the whole world. You won't let those nasty men get me will you? See you in the morning. *(starts to suck his thumb as he lies down)*

(At the last stroke of twelve GONE appears SR and slowly approaches the bed)

GONE Ebenezer, Ebenezer wakey wakey time for the your first course of treatment. *(SCROGGIE wakes suddenly, sits up in bed with sheet drawn up to his neck. He's petrified. He hugs teddy close.)*

SCROGGIE *(shaking)* Ted, Ted, speak to him, Ted! *(Shaking, Ted whispers to SCROGGIE who reacts in shock at something Ted has 'said'.) What? You haven't have you? (turns Ted upside down to check inside his trousers). Urgh you have as well! (to GONE) Are you one of the Krays? No, no Jakey said you were worse than that! So you must be from Measley's Mob? Have you come to to sort me out?*

GONE I am the ghost of Christmas Gone. I've come to show you the error of your ways. My two colleagues who follow me will fill you in more.

SCROGGIE Eeek! But I've done nothing. *(weakly, to Ted)* Ted, Help.

GONE Touch my cloak and we'll begin the journey.

(FX lighting indicates 'flying through the air'. SCROGGIE halts the 'flight' and goes back to grab Ted.)

The choir sing 'Walking in the Air'

SCROGGIE Well, this is alright. Is there a duty free on this flight? You know you could make a fortune selling fags and booze.

They 'arrive' at the USI table. A blackboard at one end. Several boys are seated at the 'desk'. A young Ebenezer (YEB) and young Measley (YJM) are seated furthest away from the board. One scared boy is standing by YEB.)

SCROGGIE It's where I went to school, The Wackford Academy! There's Smithy (SMITH), Jonesy (JONES) and Greensy Minory. And that's me and Jakey. *(Goes towards the boys)* Hello chaps do you remember me? Hee! Hee! What japes we got up to.

GONE They cannot see you Ebenezer. These are but shadows of things that have been. They have no consciousness of you.

(A new pupil stands next to YEB)

YEB Right, next. Ah you're the new boy aren't you? Name?

BEN Benjamin (*BEN*)

YEB Benjamin what?

BEN Dover

YEB (*he and YJM fall about laughing hysterically*) He should go down well here Jakey. Well Ben Dover! (*laughing even more uproariously*) It's pocket money day today. Old Wackford will distribute this term's pocket money to all the boys and Jakey here (*smarmy*) and me are here to ...er... protect you from some really horrid boys who want to take your money away. They are not nice at all and you could end up with your head down the lavatory or even worse and you wouldn't want that would you?

BEN No.

YEB Of course not, but Jakey and me will look after you. Now, how much pocket money do you get Ben Dover? (*stifling a laugh. The other boys giggle*)

BENJ One guinea each term.

YEB (*Nonchalantly*) Oh, right and where do you keep it?

YJM In the trunk at the end of my bed.

YEB Did you get that Jakey?

YJM (*writing down*) In the trunk at the bottom of his bed. Yes fine.

YEB Right Ben for a very small fee Jakey and me will guarantee that for, say half a crown a term, neither of er none, of these nasty boys will do anything to you or your money. Now that sounds a fair deal doesn't it young Ben?

BENJ Yes sir.

(*BENJ hands over the cash*)

YEB Good lad. You know it makes sense. Now run along old chap. We'll see you next term. Next! Ah. Richard Ransome (*RANS*). Hello Dickie. You know the drill. (*RANS reluctantly hands over the cash and goes to leave*). Er, one moment Dickie did I or did I not see in the paper that your pater had just sold Virgin Stage Coaches for a small fortune? In which case you can afford just a little bit more this term don't you think? Shall we say one pound?

RANS Erm.

YEB One pound it is then. (*Holds out hand. RANS hands over*) Next! Ah. It's you Churchmouse (*MOUSE*). Hand it over.

MOUSE Well it's difficult at the moment You see Pa's...