

SCENE EIGHT

SCROOGE

I understand, Spirit. You have shown her to me once again. I do remember the past. Please spirit, take me back.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

But do you remember all of it? My time grows short. Quick! You are older now. (Young Scrooge enters with bank book, money pouch, and cash box from the first office scene.) A man in the prime of his life yet you have an eager, greedy, restless motion in your eye. Your passion for something else besides Belle has taken root and I can see where the shadow of the growing tree will fall.

BELLE

(She enters clearly upset.) It matters little to you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.

YOUNG SCROOGE

What Idol has displaced you?

BELLE

A golden one.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Why must the world condemn with such severity the pursuit of wealth?

BELLE

You fear the world too much. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?

YOUNG SCROOGE

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

BELLE

Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until we could improve our worldly fortune by honest work. You are changed. When it was made, you were another man.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I was a boy.

BELLE

Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are. I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I have thought of it, and can release you.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Have I ever sought release?

BELLE

In words. No. Never.

YOUNG SCROOGE

In what, then?

BELLE

In a changed nature, in everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. Tell me, if there had never been anything between us, would you seek me out and try to win me now?

YOUNG SCROOGE

You think not.

BELLE

I would gladly think otherwise if I could, Heaven knows! But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl ---and so I release you. (She hands him the ring.) With a full heart, for the love of him you once were. (She goes to exit but stops and turns to him.)

BELLE

You may feel some pain in this. But after a brief time you will dismiss the recollection of it, gladly, as an unprofitable dream, from which you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!

(Belle exits and Young Scrooge takes takes his cashbox and exits.)

SCROOGE

Spirit! show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

One shadow more!

SCROOGE