

BELLE. *(As if in the midst of a conversation.)* It matters little to you; very little. Another idol has displaced me. If it can cheer and comfort you in times to come, as I have tried to do, I have no cause to grieve.

YOUNG SCROOGE. *(Annoyed at the distraction, but at the same time, perhaps only half-listening.)* What idol has displaced you?

BELLE. A golden one.

YOUNG SCROOGE. There is nothing on which the world is so hard as poverty, and there is nothing it professes to condemn so severely as the pursuit of wealth. Such is the hypocrisy of the world.

BELLE. You fear the world too much. All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond its reproach when it comes to wealth. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off, one by one, until one passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?

YOUNG SCROOGE. *(Checking his watch.)* What then? Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I have not changed toward you.

(A pause.)

Have I?

BELLE. Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until in good time we could improve our fortunes. 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 are not what you were. I am. How often I've felt this does not matter. It is enough that I *have* felt it. And can release you.

YOUNG SCROOGE. *(He's heard this, however.)* Have I ever sought release?

BELLE. In words, no. Never.

YOUNG SCROOGE. In what, then?

BELLE. In everything that made my love of any value in your sight.

SCROOGE. (Standing.) I'm very sorry, but I have a meeting with some important bankers.

BELLE. If we never had our past, would you try to win me now?

YOUNG SCROOGE. You think not.

BELLE. If I could think otherwise, I would. But if you were free today, would you choose a girl with so small a dowry? You, who now weigh everything by gain? If you did, regret would surely follow. So I release you.

(She takes a ring from her finger and presses it into YOUNG SCROOGE's hand.)

With a full heart for the love of him you once were.
May you be happy in the life you have chosen.

(She exits. A pause. YOUNG SCROOGE does not move.)

SCROOGE. Go to her, you fool! You fool!

(YOUNG SCROOGE wraps the ring in a piece of paper and shuts it up in a drawer in the desk, checks his watch again, and exits.)

Spirit, show me no more! Why do you delight to torture me?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST. I told you these were shadows of things that have been. That they are what they are, do not blame me.

SCROOGE. Leave me, take me back! Haunt me no longer!

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST. As you wish.

(With a wave of his hand, he vanishes.)

SCROOGE. Belle... Belle...

(A pause. DICKENS removes the sleeping cap and wig as THE CHILD appears on the turret.)

THE BOY. Where's the boy under the cap?

DICKENS. I haven't forgotten. He's coming.

THE BOY. Good.

DICKENS. What do you think?