

EBENEZER WHO?

Ralph, a grumpy college adjunct English teacher in his late twenties, is woken by a woman, twenties, in his bedroom. Since he is prone to neurotic phobias, it is not surprising that he thinks at first that she might be a drugged-up street lady breaking in to steal his belongings. She claims instead to be the new replacement for the Ghost of Christmas Past, coming to help redeem Ralph from his greedy tendencies. The only problem is that she does not seem to realize that she has the wrong "redeemee." In addition to having to convince her that he is not Ebenezer Scrooge and that they are in Cleveland, not London, Ralph fears that she might be just a little cuckoo. As the scene begins, Ralph has just woken up to find her in his bedroom window.

CHARACTERS

Ralph: late 20s

Ghost of Christmas Past: woman, 20s

SETTING

Ralph's apartment

TIME

The present, nighttime

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*Working to sound lofty.*) Hark! It is me, Mr. Scrooge, it is the Ghost of Christmas Past. (*Raising her arms awkwardly.*) But call me Chris, please.

RALPH: (*Terrified.*) Oh my God!

CHRISTMAS PAST: No, not God. I'm not God.

RALPH: (*Hiding behind his covers.*) How did you get in my window? This is the third floor, lady! (*Shooing her.*) Get out of here!

CHRISTMAS PAST: I have come from the heavens above, from the hearts of humanity.

RALPH: So what are you doing in Cleveland?!

CHRISTMAS PAST: I have come to transport you through time and —

RALPH: Oh God! You're on drugs!

CHRISTMAS PAST: Drugs?

RALPH: (*Scolding himself.*) I knew I should have locked my window, but I needed the air. I just opened it a crack. Can't breathe otherwise. Don't want to dehydrate. But no, leave a tiny crack and in flies a tiny cracked lady.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Now, wait, I don't think you understand, Mr. Scrooge. I am the coming that Marley warned you of. It is as you have been told.

RALPH: What is?

CHRISTMAS PAST: I is. I mean, I am. I mean, I am here, my Scrooge, to steal —

RALPH: Oh God! (*Pointing.*) All the stereo equipment is in there. OK?

CHRISTMAS PAST: What? No, no. I have appeared at your window to take —

RALPH: Take whatever you want, lady. I know you people on drugs get desperate. And I'm not being judgmental now, because I understand addiction. I quit smoking six months ago. That was tough. With the patch, and the gum, and the yoga, and the eating — I put on twenty pounds in the — What am I talking to you for?!

CHRISTMAS PAST: It's good to talk sometimes. But I am fearful you do not understand.

RALPH: Oh, I understand. I understand. I understand the whole . . . Ohhh! Myyyy! (*Backing up.*) There's something in your pocket that I don't need to know about, in the least! (*Extremely frightened.*) Especially if it's a ggu — !

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*Moving toward him.*) Gun?

RALPH: Stay away!

CHRISTMAS PAST: No. It's just my mittens. It's colder than a witch's you-know-what out there and then they only issue this robe. I'll just show you. (*Reaching into her pocket.*)

RALPH: (*Hiding his eyes. Screaming!*) Nooooo!

CHRISTMAS PAST: Or not.

RALPH: No, no, no need! I'll do whatever you want. I have a TV and a DVD player.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Look, I'm not here to clean out the — you have a DVD player?

RALPH: It's a little broken. You have to pop it in and out a few times but it works. Take it!

CHRISTMAS PAST: Calm — calm — calm down. I was just interested in the behind-the-scenes interviews. I'm a real film buff. Now breathe, Scrooge.

RALPH: (*Quickly.*) I can't, I can't, I can't. (*Suffocating.*) I'm suffocating!

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*Patting him gently.*) Now, now, now it is a little stuffy in here.

RALPH: Isn't it? I have a little anxiety disorder.

CHRISTMAS PAST: I noticed that.

RALPH: (*Mortified.*) Is it *that* obvious?

CHRISTMAS PAST: Um . . . (*Getting higher pitched.*) No, no . . .

RALPH: I take a little pill for it. I'm claustrophobic. And I have a touch of hypochondria. Other than that it's just a terror of heights, dogs, crowds, and small children. (*Hyperventilating.*) But you flying in my window in the middle of the night in a robe took me over the edge.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Sure, sure, that could get to anyone. Now breathe. Breeeeaaaaathe. (*Super sweet.*) It's OK now. (*Yells.*) Breathe!

RALPH: Ahhhhhhhhh! (*Ralph sucks in a quick breath.*) Wow. That's much better. Thanks.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Welcome. Oh boy, I can see what's going to happen when we get flying over childhood neighborhoods. I do have Dramamine. OK, now where was I? (*Looks at her arm beneath her sleeve.*) Oh. Right. My dear Scrooge . . . OK, so I have come to take you with me on a journey to a place far, far away —

RALPH: Scrooge? I don't mean to interrupt your robbery of anything, but did you just call me Scrooge?

CHRISTMAS PAST: Oh my. Maybe I should have referred to

you by your first name? How did the last guy do it? (*Ralph has no idea what she is talking about.*) It is more personal that way. The problem is that for some reason I can't seem to remember it.

RALPH: Well, I . . .

CHRISTMAS PAST: No, don't tell me. Don't tell me. I've been studying up on your whole life. Jeez . . . Ya know how sometimes the most important things just fly out of your mind, but silly things like the cat food jingle you heard once stays with you forever? (*He nods.*) Can you hold on a sec? (*She refers to her hand where she obviously has something written.*) Oh. That's right. (*She tries to rework her steps. Gets in place. Working to sound lofty.*) Hark! It is me, Ebenezer, it is the ghost of Christmas Past. (*Raising her arms awkwardly.*) I have come to take you on an important journey.

RALPH: (*Beat.*) OK, umm. You know, I think you have made a little mistake. Aside from being a little cuckoo too.

CHRISTMAS PAST: I'm not cuckoo. I'm here to help you cure your selfish ways, your disposition. I'll show you scenarios of your past and you'll have a catharsis.

RALPH: (*Beat.*) I'm calling the state mental facility.

CHRISTMAS PAST: No, now . . . If I were a mental case, how would I have managed to get in your window on the third floor?

RALPH: What, mental patients can't climb? Look, the only way you are *not* a mental case is if I'm dreaming. (*Realizing.*) That's it! This is a dream!

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*Again lofty sounding.*) You're not dreaming. I'm real. They who is a dream is unable to cast a shadow.

RALPH: I thought the loss of shadow was just a Peter Pan thing?

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*Waves it away with a hand.*) They who is a dream is unable to speak her own mind. They who is a dream is not me.

RALPH: You're right. My dream characters don't have so much trouble with subject-verb agreement. Maybe it's food poisoning.

CHRISTMAS PAST: I have come to, to liberate you . . .

RALPH: I told Shirley that artichoke dip was off.

CHRISTMAS PAST: From your greed and cold-heartedness and what's the word?

RALPH: Give me a hint.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Uh . . . It's kinda like when you're really mean to everybody.

RALPH: *(Thinks, folds his arms.)* Like jerky?

CHRISTMAS PAST: Yeah, but ghosts can't really say, "God, you're jerky."

RALPH: Yeah. It doesn't sound professional. How about moronic?

CHRISTMAS PAST: *(She shoots him a look of disgust.)* Uh, it's like a moron who is really, really cheap.

RALPH: Stingy?

CHRISTMAS PAST: Pretty good. But think polysyllabic. More ghost-speak.

RALPH: Avaricious?

CHRISTMAS PAST: *(Whispers with enthusiasm.)* Oh that perfect! That's great! You're good!

RALPH: Thanks.

CHRISTMAS PAST: So anyway, that's why I'm here. To sum things up, Ebenezer, I'm here to alter your avariciousness. We, there're a couple of other ghosts involved in this therapy, will take you on several journeys whereby you will go to the present, past and future, get a visual and multi-sensory, really, three-D tour, of all the kinds of nasty, rotten, Scrooge-like things you've done and you'll feel guilty enough to change your ways.

RALPH: Hmmm. Sounds fun. Though a bit familiar. Only one problem here, Chris.

CHRISTMAS PAST: What's that?

RALPH: I am not Ebenezer Scrooge.

CHRISTMAS PAST: *(Long pause while she thinks.)* What? *(Beat.)* What do you mean?

RALPH: I'm Ralph Meyers.

CHRISTMAS PAST: What are you talking about? You have to be Ebenezer Scrooge! I followed the directions. All the clouds, the quick right at the Mojave Desert. Don't tell me I flunked the interplanet navigation thing? Ralph? Are you sure?

RALPH: Sometimes I go by Ralphy.

CHRISTMAS PAST: And your last name is definitely not Scrooge?

RALPH: Meyers.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Middle name?

RALPH: Thadius.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Oh no! Your first boss wasn't a jolly, old man named Fezziwig?

RALPH: A slimy young guy named Guy.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Do you have a sister?

RALPH: Yes.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Good, good. Little Fan?

RALPH: Martha. She's a pharmaceutical sales rep.

CHRISTMAS PAST: She's still alive?

RALPH: Yeah, the big pain lives in a five-bedroom house on Avon Lake. You want me to call her and check?

CHRISTMAS PAST: No. And your fiancée Belle who left you because your passion for money outweighed your passion for her?

RALPH: Shirley? Are you kidding? *She's* the financial planner.

CHRISTMAS PAST: *(Biting her nails.)* This is terrible. I suppose there is no dilapidated schoolhouse where you were shunned by other boys and left alone for the holiday?

RALPH: No, but our house really needed new aluminum siding and my mom left me at my grandma's to help out one holiday because Gram had just had a hysterectomy. That was hell.

CHRISTMAS PAST: This is awful.

RALPH: By the way, aren't you supposed to be an old man ghost?

CHRISTMAS PAST: He retired. I've been in a training program.

RALPH: Ghosts retire?

CHRISTMAS PAST: Why shouldn't we? Don't we work hard too? And the benefits stink. Besides, do you know how redundant these jobs get? It's the same thing every year. The Ghost of Christmas Present went on a diet just to shake things up. They fired him. Just trying to get a little healthy. But noooo, "keep it traditional." They took a huge risk with me. They thought I had stilted ghost-speak.

RALPH: Yeah, I did notice that.

CHRISTMAS PAST: You did?

RALPH: Yeah, I'd cut the "Hark" thing. It sounds a little too "Angel of the baby Jesus" to me. And the "I have come from the heavens above, from the depths of blah-blah."

CHRISTMAS PAST: Oh my God. I suck! I'm terrible. And I've ruined Ebenezer's life. Christmas Past never came. He'll die unhappy and alone and, and —

RALPH: Rich as hell.

CHRISTMAS PAST: If Cratchit has to work Christmas, do you know what may happen?

RALPH: The company may make a profit? Just kidding. Don't worry. You can't be really worried. This is obviously a dream. And you're a figment of my imagination. I used to love this story so it's no wonder my subconscious would choose it. Too bad in the last ten years it's just an excuse for a bunch of money-grubbing Hollywood executives to regurgitate the same old story, "differently," in order to make a load of money from a bunch of over-sentimental, guilty-feeling, spendthrifts every Christmas season.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Exactly! A Christmas classic!

RALPH: This is the weirdest, most vivid dream I've ever had. It must be the ThermaFlu.

CHRISTMAS PAST: I'm not a figment. I can't be a figment. I'm, I'm, too committed. What a miserable failure I am!

RALPH: Welllll. Maybe you could change the story. Maybe the story is that you visit Ralph Meyers in Cleveland, Ohio, and you drag him around to the places of his youth where he

can steal antiques from his youth and bring them back to resell on eBay for exorbitant prices all in the name of giving a lonely college adjunct a little extra cash cow.

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*She puzzles.*) What?

RALPH: You don't like it?

CHRISTMAS PAST: It's not very touching.

RALPH: What if he donates ten percent of the funds to public radio? (*She rolls her eyes.*) My point is that while I think this dream or hallucination is really interesting, I think you and all of this are just a bunch of hooey.

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*Crying out.*) Tiny Tim will die!

RALPH: Maybe he won't. Maybe Cratchit will kill Scrooge and take over his business.

CHRISTMAS PAST: He's a poor crippled boy!

RALPH: Don't you get it? The redemption story is out. We don't buy it.

CHRISTMAS PAST: What time is it now?

RALPH: Eight-fifteen.

CHRISTMAS PAST: And you were in bed already?

RALPH: Look, I was taking a nap. I thought I was getting a cold. I'm not "the ghost coming barging in on the wrong house in the wrong city, in the wrong country in the wrong century at the wrong hour."

CHRISTMAS PAST: OK! So I got a little confused!

RALPH: A little?!! Anyway, I think the story was overrated. I mean, come on, how many people do you know that change overnight?

CHRISTMAS PAST: It is the idea of the instant epiphany, the overnight repentance —

RALPH: Did Oprah keep off all the weight the first time? (*Beat.*) I rest my case.

CHRISTMAS PAST: But don't you think with our help Scrooge will discover that giving does not deplete the giver but rather enriches him?

RALPH: Look, Scrooge changes at the end, but what about day

two? He's probably duping Bob Cratchit on his health insurance plan and kicking Tiny Tim off his crutches.

CHRISTMAS PAST: You have a very warped and cynical view of things, Mr. Meyers.

RALPH: I was just kidding.

CHRISTMAS PAST: No, you weren't. I think you're worse than Scrooge.

RALPH: Worse?! So convert me. You can't help Scrooge then change me in one night.

CHRISTMAS PAST: You should be ashamed of yourself, you whiney academic. Here you are a lot younger than Scrooge, perfectly healthy, surrounded by people who obviously love you, and all you can think about on Christmas is reselling items from your past on eBay. Talk about money-grubbing. What about the hungry, the elderly, the, the, cell phoneless? I couldn't really think of a good third one.

RALPH: Well, I'm not that callous.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Will you go out of your way to help anyone this Christmas? Or will you just continue to see the world with that cynical view of yours?

RALPH: God, I didn't know I was actually all that bad. Am I?

CHRISTMAS PAST: You suck! Your heart is three sizes too small.

RALPH: I did pass up a lot of charities this year.

CHRISTMAS PAST: And there is no tree in your living room I see.

RALPH: The needles are such a pain.

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*Look of disgust.*) No poinsettia purchased for your mother?

RALPH: By God, she does love those. And they cost so little. But she told me they poison her cat.

CHRISTMAS PAST: A catnip toy might do the trick. And I'm sure your sister wouldn't mind if you at least stopped calling her a big pain for the holiday.

RALPH: I always considered it a term of endearment.

CHRISTMAS PAST: And Shirley . . . well, Shirley may appreciate a small stock investment. Would that be so darn hard?

RALPH: On my salary? Yes!

CHRISTMAS PAST: And she makes no sacrifices for you? She doesn't put up with your anxiety attacks regularly? She doesn't make sure you have plenty of, of, of —

RALPH: Room deodorizer?

CHRISTMAS PAST: See! So?!

RALPH: You're right. I under-appreciate my life. You know . . . I don't do enough for others less fortunate. (*Thinking.*) You know how you said, "Will you go out of your way to help anyone this season?" I just had a thought. I could help you find Scrooge. I'm great with directions. And London is about five hours ahead of us. If we left right this minute, we may be able to make it there by one.

CHRISTMAS PAST: Why this sudden change of heart?

RALPH: It's a bad TV night. Besides, I figure this whole trippy thing is better than most psychotropic drugs.

CHRISTMAS PAST: That would be a real gift, Ralph. Especially since I know that you have fears.

RALPH: Well, we all do, don't we, of one kind or another?

CHRISTMAS PAST: Yes, but you seem to have more than your fair share.

RALPH: That's true. Maybe this is a bad idea. No, no I want to help you. I want to go. You're sure you have the Dramamine?

CHRISTMAS PAST: Positive. Just take my hand, Ralph. And we'll jump out together.

RALPH: Jump? Out? The window, you mean?

CHRISTMAS PAST: I won't let you fall. I promise.

RALPH: Yeah, you bet you won't. My brother-in-law's a lawyer and he'll sue you're little white-robed butt if you so much as —

CHRISTMAS PAST: (*Warning.*) Uh-uh-uh, Scroogy-talk.

RALPH: (*Through gritted teeth.*) Merry Christmas. (*He closes his eyes and braces himself in utter fear.*)