



Dwayne Yancey

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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A DICKENS OF A CHRISTMAS first came to life in a staged reading September 2020. Stage directions were read by Emily Bolyea-Kyere.

ROSE: Kira Simmons

LILY: Irene Kenney

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Charlie Boswell

TOBY: Stephen Baltz

PERCY: Mason Micevski

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: Martha Boswell

A DICKENS OF A CHRISTMAS

HOLIDAY COMEDY. Christmas is just a few days away and two poor street orphans, Lily and Rose, are yearning for a proper Christmas dinner. But since they don't have a ghost of a chance of escaping the grinding poverty they were born into, they conspire with two other orphans, Toby and Percy, to masquerade as ghosts from Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" to convince Lady Crumblebum to invite them for Christmas dinner. Instead, the famously grumpy Lady Crumblebum sends shivers down the "ghosts" spines and tasks them with reuniting her with her long-lost love in exchange for Christmas dinner. This may be a crazy request, but in this case, fraud may be the key to success! Easy to stage with one-liners for everyone in the cast.

Performance Time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.

NOTE: Check out Dwayne Yancey's other hilarious comedies featuring Rose and Lily: *This Rose Has Thorns* and *An Improper Education for an Improper Lady*.



Charles Dickens, 1842

ABOUT THE STORY

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) wrote *A Christmas Carol* in just six weeks, and it has remained his most popular work. After suffering from hardship and poverty as a boy, Dickens sympathized with the plight of the poor and felt strongly that social reform was needed to eradicate social inequity.

CHARACTERS

(3 M, 3 F)

ROSE: A poor street orphan who devises several schemes to attain a proper Christmas dinner; plays the Ghost of Christmas Past; wears a dirty, ragged dress; female.

LILY: Rose's younger sister who suffers from intense dread every time Rose comes up with a new scheme; plays the Ghost of Christmas Present; wears a dirty, ragged dress; female.

TOBY: A poor street orphan who grew up in the same orphanage as Lily and Rose; he can spin a good yarn, but the word "work" sends shivers up his spine; plays the Ghost of Jacob Marley; wears dirty, tattered clothing; male.

PERCY: Toby's brother and his chatty partner in crime; plays the Ghost of Christmas Future; male.

LADY AGATHA HARRIET CRUMBLEBUM: A rich old lady who is unafraid of ghosts; yearns to find her long-lost love; female.

COLONEL CLARENCE BRAMPTON: A scowling, retired military man; the thought of Lady Crumblebum sends shivers down his spine; wears attire suitable for a gentleman and carries a cane or umbrella; male.

VOICE: A member of the cast or a stagehand may provide the offstage voice, if desired.

SETTING

Victorian-era London.

SETS

Note: The sets may be as simple or elaborate as your budget allows.

Streets of Victorian London. A backdrop may be used.

Exterior of the Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club. A backdrop may be used.

Interior of the Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club. Furnishings depict an exclusive, private men's club. There are two potted plants large enough to hide behind.

Interior of Lady Crumblebum's home. There is a fireplace with a chimney large enough to enter through. There are four working closet doors.

Exterior of Lady Crumblebum's home. A backdrop may be used.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Outside Mr. Tabby's Pie Shoppe

Scene 2: Streets of London.

Scene 3: Outside the Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club.

Scene 4: Inside the Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club.

Scene 5: Inside the Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club.

Intermission, opt.

ACT II

Scene 1: Streets of London.

Scene 2: Inside the home of Lady Crumblebum.

Scene 3: Outside the home of Lady Crumblebum.

Scene 4: Inside the home of Lady Crumblebum.

PROPS

4 Meat pies
Cane or umbrella, for Colonel Brampton
2 Coins
2 Large potted plants
Membership card, for Percy
Gentlemen's clothing, for Lily and Rose
2 Fake mustaches, for Lily and Rose
Fake sideburns, for Lily
Ghost of Jacob Marley costume with locks, chains, and moneyboxes, for Toby
Ghost of Christmas Past costume with soot on it, for Rose
Ghost of Christmas Present costume, for Lily
Ghost of Christmas Future costume, for Percy
Candlestick
Fireplace poker
Humorous household object, for Percy to defend himself with
2 Glasses
Cloth bag, to put over Colonel Brampton's head

A DICKENS OF A CHRISTMAS
10

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Rattling noise from chimney
Knock at the door
Glowing candle

A DICKENS OF A CHRISTMAS

II

"SOMEHOW THAT DICKENS FELLOW
MANAGES TO MAKE POVERTY
SEEM SO NOBLE.
SO UPLIFTING."

—PERCY

ACT I
SCENE I

(AT RISE: Streets of London. Lily and Rose are about to get kicked out of their place of employment, Mr. Tabby's Pie Shoppe.)

VOICE: (Offstage, shouts.) Get out! And stay out!

(Lily and Rose stumble on, as if shoved.)

ROSE: Well! Of all the nerve!

LILY: That didn't exactly work out as planned.

ROSE: Not a very enlightened employer, I'd say.

LILY: Well, technically, we were stealing, I suppose.

ROSE: We were sampling the meat pies. Think of it as quality control.

LILY: I'm pretty sure he thought of it as stealing.

ROSE: It's only stealing if you take it with you. (Burps.)
Which I guess we kinda did. (Pulls out a meat pie hidden in her dress.)

LILY: Well, that's an interesting hiding spot.

ROSE: A lady never reveals her secrets, Lily.

LILY: Or her stolen goods, apparently.

ROSE: I wouldn't say "steal." I think of it more as a "severance package."

LILY: We didn't even work there an hour. I don't think we get a severance package. I don't even know what a severance package is. (Thinks.) It's not when they cut your head off, is it? Because I don't want to have my head cut off.

ROSE: It's like a going-away present.

LILY: We're orphans in Victorian London. Nobody gives us any presents.

ROSE: In this case, we simply gave ourselves one...or two.
(Pulls out another meat pie hidden in her dress.)

LILY: Another one?

ROSE: Fine. Here's one for you. *(Pulls another meat pie hidden in her dress and gives it to Lily.)* It's Christmas, anyway. Sorry I don't have a bow to put on it. I could go hide it under a bush in the park if that makes it feel more Christmassy.

LILY: That's all right. I'm good. *(Pulls out a meat pie hidden in her dress. Indicating meat pie.)* What kind do you think these are, anyway?

ROSE: These? Probably cat.

LILY: What?!

ROSE: The whiskers kind of give it away.

LILY: Ew! That's disgusting!

ROSE: See, that's why he needed someone to do quality control.

LILY: On the other hand, this may be all we get to eat for a while. *(Bites into the meat pie.)*

ROSE: I must admit, this does set back our search for gainful employment.

LILY: *(Chewing meat pie.)* Kind of chewy.

ROSE: It won't look very good on our resumes.

LILY: *(Chewing meat pie.)* Definitely kind of chewy.

ROSE: Prior employment, "Mr. Tabby's Pie Shoppe."

LILY: *(Chewing meat pie.)* In fact, I'm not sure "chewy" is the best word, actually.

ROSE: Dates of employment, 8 a.m. to 8:45 a.m.

LILY: *(Chewing meat pie.)* More like very...resilient.

ROSE: Reason for leaving? Hmm... *(Thinks.)* "Management's failure to establish clear expectations."

LILY: *(Indicating meat pie.)* Quite durable, really.

ROSE: I mean, how were we supposed to know we weren't allowed to take what we wanted?

LILY: *(Indicating meat pie.)* To be honest, it's rather tough.

ROSE: I really don't understand this whole capitalist system.

LILY: *(Indicating meat pie.)* But surprisingly enough, it does not taste like chicken.

ROSE: I mean, they call it a "free market." We were working in a market. Shouldn't that mean things are free?

LILY: (*Indicating meat pie.*) Which is something of a relief because if everything tastes like chicken, how do you know it's not really chicken that tastes like everything else? Maybe that whole "tastes like chicken" thing is really just some marketing ploy so we don't realize we're actually eating something that tastes like some really disgusting creature.

ROSE: You know what I think, Lily?

LILY: That our lowly social status and deep pangs of hunger have driven us to eat some mystery meat deemed inedible by decent society?

ROSE: I'm pretty sure this whole "working for a living" thing just isn't going to work out. I mean, we gave it a good shot and all.

LILY: We worked at one shop for 45 minutes before we got fired for stealing!

ROSE: My point exactly. At this rate, we're going to have to get fired six days a week just to be able to find something to eat, and then what are we doing to do about Sundays?

LILY: Maybe next time we should just put in an honest day's work.

ROSE: For what? The few shillings that would come our way for spending all day over a hot stove in a meat pie shop?

LILY: I'm pretty sure that's how it's supposed to work.

ROSE: You know, come to think of it, I never saw any hot stove there...

LILY: The rich have money because they're rich.

ROSE: Just lots of dishes of cat food...

LILY: The rest of us have to do their bidding, and if we do as we're told, they give us a pittance of their riches.

ROSE: But, oddly, never any cats...

LILY: You know, you're right, that's not a very good system.

ROSE: Maybe the fact that the place is called "Mr. Tabby's Pie Shoppe" should have been a giveaway...

LILY: Well, I suppose it's a good system for rich people. At least somebody comes out ahead, I guess.

ROSE: You know what we need, Lily?

LILY: A toothpick?

ROSE: A benefactor!

LILY: Well, right now I could use a toothpick. (*Indicating meat pie.*) It's kind of stringy.

ROSE: If we had a benefactor, we wouldn't have to sleep out on the streets, trying to live by our wits.

LILY: I never did understand how that was supposed to work because I'm not really good at telling jokes.

ROSE: We could live in a fine house and sit by a warm fire sipping tea and eating crumpets. And you know what the best part would be?

LILY: I guess it depends. What flavor of crumpet? I only know the moldy kind.

ROSE: We wouldn't even have to pocket the silverware because it would already belong to us!

LILY: That's good because silverware is heavy. Makes it hard to run away when your pockets are full, like that time we tried to nick some from that pub on Goodge Street. When that tavern keeper was chasing us down the street and we were trying to lighten our load, I felt like we were sailors at sea. (*Calls.*) Knife and fork overboard! Knife and fork overboard! More like pirates, really, I suppose.

ROSE: These days, all the really fashionable orphans have benefactors. At least, that's what I read in that Dickens story.

LILY: Is that what we are, Rose? Pirates? Because that sounds a lot better than being thieves. They send thieves to jail...or worse, Australia.

ROSE: I wonder how someone goes about finding a benefactor?

LILY: Being a pirate sounds glamorous. I wouldn't mind being glamorous.

ROSE: You'd think at Christmastime benefactors would be falling all over themselves trying to find some orphans to take in...part of that whole Christmas spirit thing.

LILY: One time in Trafalgar Square, a pigeon landed on my shoulder. That made me feel like a pirate.

ROSE: We should have benefactors lined up offering their services. "Next! Take a number and wait!"

LILY: It didn't make me feel very glamorous, though, so I'm really confused.

ROSE: Oh, well, I guess we'll just have to go out and find our own, then.

LILY: Our own what? Our own pirates?

ROSE: No, our own benefactor.

LILY: Oh, because I'm pretty sure pirates aren't benefactors. I think it works the other way around.

ROSE: I suppose we could hang out on a street corner and pass out leaflets. "Wanted: Benefactor. Inquire within."

LILY: I don't think too many potential benefactors are just walking around on the street. They're probably riding in carriages with servants and such to keep people like us away from them. That's because we're not glamorous.

ROSE: We could put an advertisement in "The Times." "Wanted: Benefactor. No experience required." Probably best we not set our sights too high. I think an entry-level benefactor would do, don't you?

LILY: An advertisement in "The Times" is going to cost money.

ROSE: That's true. We'd probably have to get fired from a lot more places to afford that. And they probably don't take payment in meat pies, either.

LILY: If we were glamorous, "The Times" would pay us...to tell all our secrets. If only we had some secrets.

ROSE: We could try going door to door. That's how brush salesmen do it.

LILY: We could make some secrets up! They probably wouldn't believe them, though. I think you have to be a politician to get away with that.

ROSE: "Hello, my name is Rose, and this is my sister, Lily. Could we interest you in being a benefactor? For less than

one pound a day you could raise two deserving orphans out of crushing poverty and lift them into the lap of luxury.”

LILY: I'm pretty sure that's not how it's done.

ROSE: You're right. We shouldn't go together. You hit one side of the street, and I'll hit the other. That way, we'll cover more territory.

LILY: I mean, I don't think benefactors actually open their own doors. They probably have servants to do that kind of thing for them.

ROSE: True. Do you have a better idea for how to find one?

LILY: Not really.

ROSE: All right, then. Door to door it is! Come on!

(Rose starts to exit, pulling Lily with her.)

LILY: Hey!

(Rose and Lily exit. Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: *Streets of London.*)

VOICE: (*Offstage, shouts.*) Get out! And stay out!

(*Rose and Lily stumble on, as if shoved. They brush themselves off.*)

ROSE: I think we can definitely say that people on this street are not in the holiday spirit.

LILY: The man at that one house was definitely into *spirits*.
Bleh! (*Waves her hand to indicate the man had liquor on his breath.*)

ROSE: We may need to refine our approach somewhat.

LILY: "Refine" isn't exactly a word that describes us very well.

ROSE: Maybe that's our problem. Maybe we don't look deserving enough. Maybe we need to make ourselves look even more desperate.

LILY: That wasn't what I was thinking.

ROSE: Get some coal. (*Removes a piece of coal from her dress.*)
Rough up your cheeks some. (*Smears Lily's cheeks with coal.*)
Maybe tangle up your hair some more. (*Messes up Lily's hair.*)

LILY: Hey! What are you doing?!

ROSE: I'm trying to make you more presentable...or less.

LILY: But why?

ROSE: Marketing, Lily, marketing. It's all about the marketing. Clearly, we look too posh to qualify for any handouts on this street.

LILY: I think maybe the problem is they're not interested in giving any handouts.

ROSE: Well, that's not very sporting of them. How do they expect to get ahead that way?

LILY: I'm pretty sure they already are ahead.

ROSE: Perhaps we need a more businesslike approach.

LILY: As long as it doesn't involve me getting covered in coal dust.

ROSE: Instead of asking for a handout, we ask them for a hand up.

LILY: Sounds good. What's the difference?

ROSE: Semantic, mostly.

LILY: I don't know what that means.

ROSE: It means we ask them for an investment.

LILY: An investment in what?

ROSE: Oh, I don't know. (*Thinks.*) Maybe our expedition to the Arctic...or the Antarctic. One of those places.

LILY: We have an expedition to the Arctic?

ROSE: Of course not. We just make them think we have an expedition to the Arctic. They get the prestige of underwriting the whole venture. We'll even put their name on it in all the publicity materials. Think of all the glory they'll get as sponsors! Sadly, the expedition will be lost. Such a tragedy. But there's certain notoriety in being associated with a tragedy if you play it right.

LILY: Wait. What?! We get lost?!

ROSE: Never heard from again. Most likely frozen to death...or eaten by polar bears.

LILY: I'm not sure I like either of those.

ROSE: The mystery will just heighten our posthumous fame. "Posthumous" means "after they think we're dead."

LILY: That whole frozen to death or eaten by polar bears thing?

ROSE: They give us a nice memorial service. We get our names on some plaque somewhere. Maybe even a cenotaph in Hyde Park.

LILY: Sounds nice. But I'm not really seeing what we get out of this...or them, either, for that matter.

ROSE: Oh, they lose their whole investment.

LILY: They won't like that. We're not going to send the economy into a tailspin, are we? Because I'd sure hate to be

responsible for a recession. We definitely won't get any handouts then.

ROSE: Meanwhile, we abscond with all the money to North America and set ourselves up as queens.

LILY: So we steal it, then?

ROSE: Pretty sure that's what "abscond" means. It's just a little classier.

LILY: Oh. So you want us to engage in stock fraud, then?

ROSE: Only a little bit...plus some embezzlement and soliciting money under false pretenses. We will have moved up in the world, Lily. Instead of begging for scraps on the street, we'll be committing a whole statute book of financial crimes! That's a whole new social strata! All those people who say Britain's class system holds down the poor...we'll prove them wrong! Fraud is the key to success!

LILY: There's just one problem, Rose.

ROSE: What's that?

LILY: I don't think they have queens in North America.

ROSE: Well, whatever. It's just an expression. We'll be rich, mysterious women living in a big house in Boston.

LILY: Oh, mysterious. I'm not sure I feel very mysterious. Mostly, I just feel hungry.

ROSE: The talk of society!

LILY: I don't think I'd like it if people talked about us.

ROSE: Gentlemen callers will line up to seek our affection. They'll bring us roses, chocolates, only the finest of wines.

LILY: Gentlemen callers, you say?

ROSE: Instead of us having to ask for handouts, they will bring them to us!

LILY: Oh, that does sound like a better business model.

ROSE: Naturally, we turn them all away.

LILY: We do?

ROSE: That's how we make sure they keep coming back. We play hard to get.

LILY: Ah! Like that time we outran the police when we were nicking men's wallets in Covent Garden. We played hard to get then.

ROSE: Um, not quite the same thing. *(Looks off.)* Oh, look, here comes a random rich person! Look needy.

LILY: How do I look needy? I thought we were already pretty needy.

ROSE: Remember, it's Christmas. Everybody's hearts are a little softer at Christmas.

LILY: That's probably just from all the cooking grease...softens the heart but hardens the arteries.

(Colonel Brampton enters, scowling. Every fiber of his being conveys absolute displeasure. Rose approaches him.)

ROSE: Hello, good sir, and a happy Christmas to you.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Out of my way!

(Rose and Lily get in front of the Colonel and try to block his path.)

ROSE: Might I possibly interest you in—?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I said, out of my way, you worthless urchin!

ROSE: Oh, I realize we may appear to be worthless urchins to you, but in reality—

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* In reality, we're famed Arctic explorers who are raising money for our next expedition. We want to go to the North Pole and discover Santa Claus and bring him back and put him in the Regent's Park Zoo! *(Rose stares at Lily. To Rose, confused.)* What? Are we not doing that one now?

ROSE: *(Going along.)* Sure! *(To Colonel.)* So, as a patriot and an astute businessman, might I interest you in helping to underwrite our expedition? We wouldn't want the French to get there first, now would we? You know how wily the French are.

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* Just a small donation will do.

ROSE: *(To Colonel.)* Basically, whatever you have in your pockets.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: What's the meaning of this?! Are you trying to rob me in broad daylight?!

ROSE: Rob? Oh, no, sir, we would never want to rob anyone. We are most certainly against robbing, although I must admit that Robin Hood is an iconic English hero—

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* I think by definition, "rob" involves a threat of force. We mostly do our thieving through acts of deception.

ROSE: *(To Colonel.)* And, technically, it's rather overcast, so it's not really broad daylight, now is it?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(Waving his cane or umbrella.)* Why, I ought to brain you two! Do you have any idea who it is you're speaking to?!

ROSE: Um...Prince Albert? *(To Lily, stage whisper.)* I see a bit of a resemblance, don't you?

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* "Some random rich person," that's all she said.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I'll have you know, I am none other than Colonel Clarence Brampton, Her Majesty's Light Infantry, Second Brigade, retired!

ROSE: Ah, I thought so! Then, surely, a man of your stature can appreciate the importance of our expedition!

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* If the French get there first, who knows what might happen? They'll be eating frogs and snails at the North Pole while we're still— *(On second thought.)* You know, I really don't think there's much strategic significance to the North Pole.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I did not serve all across this mighty empire just so that I could be accosted on the streets at home by a band of common ruffians!

ROSE: Oh, I assure you, we're not common at all. Quite uncommon, actually.

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* We're pickpockets, we're swindlers, we're scammers, we're con artists...and now we're trying to move up in the world to financial schemes.

ROSE: *(To Colonel.)* What my sister means is that she hasn't learned to shut her mouth when discussing matters of grave national import.

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* But mostly we're just orphans.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Why, you little scoundrels! If I had my sidearm with me, I'd clear out the lot of you like a nest of rabid badgers. That's how we did it in the colonies.

ROSE: But, please, sir...it's Christmas and we've got no place to stay –

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* Were there a lot of rabid badgers in the colonies? Because if infestations like that are pretty common, that doesn't sound very conducive to colonization.

ROSE: *(To Colonel.)* Can't you spare just a little bit for me and my sister here?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: The only thing I'm going to spare on you is the rod, but if you persist in impeding my progress, I'll have to resort to other contingencies. Now, out of my way! You hooligans are going to make me late for the club!

ROSE: But, sir, we've been all up and down this block. No one will help us.

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* Except for the big house on the corner. We haven't been there yet.

(Colonel is thoroughly shaken by this.)

COLONEL BRAMPTON: What?! You mean Lady Crumblebum's residence?!

LILY: Oh, we have no idea who lives there.

ROSE: *(To Colonel.)* Just another house to us.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Goodness gracious! The very thought of that woman sends shivers down my spine! I'd rather face getting trapped in quicksand, falling into a nest

of vipers, or being cornered by hungry tigers raised on man flesh than endure even a look from that horrid creature! Here, take this shilling. (*Pulls out a coin from his pocket and hands it to Rose.*) In fact, take two. (*Hands a coin to Lily.*) If you value your life, get as far away from that witch as you can. There's not a wind in all of Siberia that's colder than that failed attempt at humanity. (*Frantic.*) The club! I must get to the club! Safety! Refuge! (*Rushes off, terrified.*)

ROSE: (*To Lily.*) I wonder what all that was about?

LILY: Apparently, either a traumatic experience with a nest of vipers...or Lady Crumblebum.

ROSE: I think we learned at least one thing from that, though.

LILY: To avoid hungry tigers raised on man flesh or to avoid Lady Crumblebum?

ROSE: The club!

LILY: I don't think a club would be very effective, except at short range, and I'd rather not be at short range with a hungry tiger raised on man flesh.

ROSE: Not that kind of club! His kind of club...a private club.

LILY: What about it?

ROSE: We need to join!

LILY: I don't think they let our kind into clubs.

ROSE: Of course not, they have money there.

LILY: Exactly.

ROSE: Which is precisely why we need to join!

LILY: It doesn't sound like Colonel Brampton will be sponsoring us for membership anytime soon.

ROSE: Think of it, Lily, once we get in, we spend all day sitting by the warm fire, drinking fine Scotch whiskey, and eating roasted duck with an orange glaze!

LILY: I'll admit it does sounds better than being eaten by hungry tigers raised on man flesh...or those polar bears at the North Pole.

ROSE: It's practically Christmas every day at the club!

LILY: How do you know they have roasted duck with an orange glaze, though?

ROSE: It's a club! They're bound to have roasted duck!
Roasted duck, roasted goose, roasted pheasant...every
roasted thing you can imagine.

LILY: I'm not sure I'd want to roast everything I can imagine.

ROSE: Have you ever dined on roasted duck, Lily? I
have...every night in my overactive imagination.

LILY: We once roasted that drowned pigeon we found in a
fountain. Does that count?

ROSE: Come on, let's go get cleaned up. We need to present
ourselves for membership.

LILY: I like the sound of getting cleaned up. But wait. How
do we present ourselves for membership at some club?

ROSE: We use fancy words and curtsy a lot. I'm pretty sure
that's all there is to it. Come on. Who knows? They might
even underwrite our Arctic expedition!

(Rose and Lily rush off. Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(AT RISE: Outside the Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club.)

VOICE: *(Offstage, shouts.)* Get out! And stay out!

(Rose and Lily stumble on, as if shoved. They brush themselves off.)

ROSE: *(To Lily.)* Well, that wasn't very nice.

LILY: So does this mean they won't accept us as members?

ROSE: Who knew private clubs are only for men? That doesn't seem fair.

LILY: They act as if we're some kind of dangerous species. Are we a dangerous species, Rose?

ROSE: We have a queen now. I thought we were living in an enlightened age.

LILY: I wonder what Darwin would have to say about all this?

ROSE: I mean, both boys and girls have an equal opportunity to be left poor on the streets and sent to work as child laborers in the mills and mines. You'd think we'd have the same opportunity at the top of the heap as at the bottom.

LILY: Perhaps we should go back to shaking down strangers on the street. At least we each got a shilling from Colonel Brampton.

ROSE: I have a better idea!

LILY: Why do I always get this feeling of intense dread when you have a better idea?

ROSE: Come on, it wasn't that bad that time I made you dress up as a kangaroo.

LILY: You tried to sell me to a circus!

ROSE: You take off the kangaroo costume, run away, and I sell you to the next circus. It was a foolproof plan.

LILY: You were right about that. It proved we were fools.

ROSE: How was I to know they knew what a kangaroo actually looked like? Otherwise, it would have totally worked.

LILY: The costume was a couple of bed sheets dyed orange and sewn together with a pillowcase for a pouch.

ROSE: I tried to teach you some boxing tricks. Maybe if you'd punched that circus promoter, you'd have been more convincing.

LILY: I think making a run for it was still the most effective way out of that situation.

ROSE: It did set off an elephant stampede, so that was a useful distraction.

LILY: I think the circus I'm best suited for is Piccadilly. Maybe we should just go back to panhandling there.

ROSE: Nonsense, Lily. It's time to think big!

LILY: The last time we thought big, we tried to sell the British Museum a box of chicken bones wrapped in those same orange bed sheets and claimed it was the mummy of some Egyptian pharaoh.

ROSE: I agree. I should have taken off the tag that said, "Made in the dark, Satanic Mills" but we won't make that mistake again. We've learned our lesson there.

LILY: What mistake will we make this time?

ROSE: We're going to go back and join that club.

LILY: The one they just kicked us out of? That doesn't sound much like learning a lesson to me.

ROSE: You saw the place, Lily! Well, at least the lobby before they—you know—heaved us out into the street because we weren't *gentlemen*.

LILY: Mostly, I just saw the coat rack and the umbrella stand.

ROSE: So where would you rather spend Christmas...out here on the cold, wet streets of London, or inside in the comfort of The Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club?

LILY: In hindsight, we should have paid more attention to the name. I'm pretty sure we'll never qualify for membership there.

ROSE: On the contrary, we now know exactly what we need to do to qualify for membership.

LILY: What's that?

ROSE: You know...

LILY: No, I don't.

ROSE: Oh, yes, you do.

LILY: I'm not wearing a kangaroo costume again!

ROSE: No kangaroo costume this time.

LILY: Good. So what, then?

ROSE: We both wear costumes.

LILY: Wait. If I'm not wearing the kangaroo costume, does that mean I have to be a wombat? Because I don't even know what a wombat is.

ROSE: I mean, we dress up to qualify for membership.

LILY: In an all-men's club? I don't see how since we're not—
(Realizes.) Oh, no!

ROSE: Oh, yes!

LILY: Oh, no!

ROSE: Oh, yes!

LILY: Oh, no, no, no!

ROSE: Oh, yes, yes, yes!

LILY: Maybe we could reconsider the kangaroo costume?

ROSE: Come on, Lily, we've got some shopping to do...or at least stealing off people's clotheslines.

LILY: Please don't tell me I have to wear a mustache!

(Rose and Lily exit. Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(AT RISE: *Inside the Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club, a short time later. Two large potted plants are onstage.*)

VOICE: (*Offstage, shouts.*) Get out! And stay out!

(*Toby and Percy enter, trying to pass themselves off as posh gentlemen.*)

TOBY: (*With airs.*) I do say, Percy, the rabble is getting rather rabble-ish tonight, aren't they?

PERCY: (*With airs.*) Quite fearfully so, I must say.

TOBY: The lower orders somehow seem to think they are entitled to special privileges at Christmas. Have you noticed that?

PERCY: The audacity of them to be out on the street corners begging for money.

TOBY: From their betters.

PERCY: Hard to beg from their lowers.

TOBY: Although, I suspect the worst and most desperate of their kind have tried.

PERCY: It's the peculiar curse of their blighted class. They are so low in the social hierarchy that they seem to think their station in life can somehow be remediated through supplication for alms.

TOBY: I wonder whatever gave them the idea that social class is anything but an immutable law of nature ordained by the heavens?

PERCY: Most likely those dreadful newspapers, wouldn't you agree? Always stirring up trouble, giving people wrong ideas!

TOBY: Sensationalizing things, blowing them out of proportion!

PERCY: Glamorizing criminals!

TOBY: Which we all know will only encourage them.

PERCY: Embolden them!

TOBY: Practically incite them to riot!

PERCY: Or at least practice the low arts of deception.

TOBY: Very low.

PERCY: And quite deceptive, too.

TOBY: Practically swindlers.

PERCY: Conning people with fantastical tales designed to elicit some sympathetic response.

TOBY: Tugging at people's heartstrings to get to their wallets.

PERCY: A time-tested practice, although not a particularly efficient one.

TOBY: Fortunately, we live in a more enlightened age.

PERCY: Scientific progress all around us.

TOBY: More modern methods.

PERCY: The wonders of the Industrial Age!

TOBY: Allowing us to rise above the primitive ways of the past.

PERCY: And the teeming masses out on the street.

TOBY: Definitely want to rise above the teeming masses out on the street.

PERCY: The unwashed masses.

TOBY: All the dirt on their faces.

PERCY: All the lice in their hair.

TOBY: Such a vile, repulsive lot.

PERCY: Their very poverty is but a testimony of their moral deficiency.

TOBY: I'm certainly glad we are above all that.

PERCY: Indeed. A much better view from up here.

TOBY: And much less competition.

PERCY: (*Inhales.*) Ah, the rarefied air of a London gentlemen's club.

TOBY: (*Inhales.*) I think that might be the smell of a roast wafting in from the kitchen.

TOBY/PERCY: (*Inhale deeply.*) Ahhhhh!

(Toby and Percy drop their airs, laugh, and revert to their true selves.)

TOBY: Now, this is the life! Can you believe we convinced the doorman we are members?

PERCY: Our impersonation skills are apparently quite superb.

TOBY: It's all in how you carry yourself. "Pip-pip!" "Tally-ho!" All that rubbish.

PERCY: Well, so far it's carried us up a flight of stairs into the main ballroom, so I'd say it's carried us very well.

TOBY: If every day smells this good, can you imagine what Christmas dinner must be like?

PERCY: I daresay, we shall soon savor the most bountiful feast ever seen in all of Christendom.

TOBY: Only the fattest goose will do, Percy, only the fattest goose. Although, I might deign myself and try the duck, if circumstances demand. Do you think it will have an orange glaze? I do so hope it has an orange glaze! I've dreamed of an orange glaze ever since I was old enough to remember. I have no idea what an orange glaze is, but I do hope there is one.

PERCY: Just remember your table manners, Toby. We're in high society now.

TOBY: Oh, I remember my table manners. Never let go of the fork. That way, if they start to catch on, I can stab the goose and take it with me!

PERCY: Your practicality is admirable, but our great ruse depends on confidence and sophistication.

TOBY: Oh, I am completely confident that I will stab that goose!

PERCY: Well, just keep in mind the goose hasn't been served yet, but— *(Hears someone approaching offstage.)*

TOBY: But what?

PERCY: Somebody's coming.

TOBY: I hope it's the sommelier. I'm rather parched. Aren't you rather parched?

PERCY: Look sharp. It's game on.

TOBY: *(With airs.)* Righto. Tip-top. Pip-pip and Jolly Roger.
(Normal voice.) Or something like that.

(Colonel Brampton enters and halts when he sees Toby and Percy.)

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(To Toby.)* I don't know you.

TOBY: Ah, pleased to meet you, sir. I'm Toby.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* And I'm Percy.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I don't know you, either.

TOBY: Well, now you do! It's an honor, sir. And you are...?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(Suspicious.)* Are you two members here?

PERCY: *(Showing him a membership card.)* Full rank and privileges.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Humph. I don't remember being asked to vote on any new members.

TOBY: Perhaps it happened a day you weren't here?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I've been here every day since I retired from Her Majesty's service.

TOBY: Then it's an honor to meet a fellow veteran of the wars. Her Majesty's Light Infantry myself.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Is that so? It just so happened I served in Her Majesty's Light Infantry.

TOBY: Why, what a coincidence! Then you and I are truly brothers in arms. I was a left-tenant. *(Indicating Percy.)* And my compatriot, here, was a right-tenant!

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(To Percy.)* A right-tenant?

PERCY: *(Laughs. To Colonel, indicating Toby.)* Such a kidder, always such a kidder. *(To Toby, stage whisper.)* There's no such thing as a "right-tenant."

COLONEL BRAMPTON: So what rank did you attain?

PERCY: I was ah...uh...left-tenant as well!

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* Just on the right flank!

COLONEL BRAMPTON: You two don't look old enough to be lieutenants to me.

TOBY: We were...we were overachievers, sir.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: You barely look old enough to be a lance corporal.

PERCY: Meteoric rise through the ranks, sir.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Or as we used to say in the officer's tent, "cannon fodder."

TOBY: Battlefield promotions, in fact.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: A likely story. The world is full of hucksters and charlatans, who claim to have done things that brave men—who have actually done them—know better than to speak of. No better than thieves they are...thieves who would steal the glory from men who have shed their blood for Queen and Country!

TOBY: Oh, I can assure you, we've never stolen any glory at all, have we, Percy?

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Glory is definitely not something we've ever stolen.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* Probably wouldn't fit in our pockets, anyway.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: So what action did you two see? Name the place and the battle. I'm familiar with every campaign ever fought on behalf of this great empire! I've studied every clash of arms from Hastings to the present hour.

PERCY: Every clash of arms, you say?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Every battle worth a name.

TOBY: Ah, well, this was more of a skirmish, actually.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* But enough to merit a promotion.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Name the action, or I'll have you two court-martialed as imposters!

TOBY: The name?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: The name of this supposed battle you claim to have been in. And, mind you, I know every officer of the line. If you're lying to me, I will find you out, you little strapping.

PERCY: I don't think, technically, it was ever actually assigned a name.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: That's highly irregular.

TOBY: We were quite irregular. Or perhaps we were fighting irregulars. One or the other. Maybe even both.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* I believe it was actually some problem with the paperwork in Whitehall. You know how the bureaucrats are.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Humph, that I do. Civilians...meddlesome lot.

TOBY: In fact, it was a secret mission.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Secret, you say?

TOBY: Oh, yes, quite confidential.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Strictly need-to-know basis.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* For the Prime Minister's eyes only.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Which might explain that whole thing with the paperwork in Whitehall. Just a hunch.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Quite possibly. Or perhaps it's all just a part of an elaborate fabrication to pass yourselves off as military veterans and trade on the reputation of men who have paid the supreme sacrifice.

TOBY: Oh, we'd never do that, would we, Percy?

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* A thoroughly despicable thing to do.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* Dishonorable, in fact.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Depraved. Demeaning.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* Demoralizing. All those other "D"-words.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Demand. There's a "D"-word for you.

TOBY: I beg your pardon?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I demand proof of your claim. I will not have the name of this great club sullied by fakes and frauds and phonies –

TOBY: Right. So...

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* It's rather hard to prove something that officially never happened, if you understand my meaning.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* And I think, technically, “phony” starts with a “ph,” so unless you were going simply for the audio alliteration rather than the actual spelling, you might want to just stick with “fakes and frauds.”

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Don’t make me take this up the chain of command!

TOBY: Right. The chain of command.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Perhaps if you will allow us to withdraw just a moment to consult with our superiors on the advisability of releasing the information you requested—

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Your superiors? I’ll have you know that I am your superior!

(Pause.)

TOBY: Right. *(Jumps into action and starts re-enacting a made-up scene.)* So there we were in the Punjab...the hot, steamy, inhospitable Punjab, a land of infinite mysteries and unspeakable horrors, a place of strange customs and even stranger ways, a place beyond the ken of any Englishman, a place so alien to our experience that even a trek through the remotest highlands of Scotland with all of its feuding clans seems like a merry picnic in Hyde Park by comparison. The inexplicable, inscrutable, indecipherable Punjab—

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(Nostalgic.)* Ah, yes, I remember the Punjab! It was all of those things!

TOBY: *(Continues.)* So we’re on a routine re-supply mission, but nothing is ever routine in the Punjab, as I’m sure you well know.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Quite right about that.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* So we’re moving along through the jungle, the men in the van wielding machetes to chop down the vines...chop, chop, chop—

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(Nostalgic.)* I remember the vines...

TOBY: *(Continues.)* Behind them, the elephant train, their trunks wrapped around great logs swinging left and right to clear a path for the wagons.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(Nostalgic.)* Ah, yes, elephants. A marvelous invention. Quite underappreciated as a weapon of war.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* Out of the dark depths of the forest, we hear a noise. We stop. Always on alert –

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(Nostalgic.)* Vigilance. That's the watchword. One must always be vigilant in the Punjab.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* It's just a troop of monkeys caterwauling through the trees –

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I remember the monkeys. Never liked the monkeys.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* So we go on chopping down the vines...chop, chop, chop. The elephants swinging their trunks...swing, swing, swing. Then, suddenly, it happens. No warning whatsoever. An ambush!

COLONEL BRAMPTON: An ambush! I knew it!

TOBY: *(Continues.)* It's a tribe of cannibals...poison spears flying through the air, a witch doctor chanting these strange chants and shaking his shaker thing, a long staff with a skull on the top –

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I believe it's called a "talisman."
(Realizes.) Wait. *(Suspicious.)* Did you say there were cannibals in the Punjab? I've never heard of any cannibals in the Punjab.

PERCY: That's why the mission has been classified.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* All part of the cover-up.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Ah, right. Makes perfectly good sense. Can't be letting information like that out to the general public...starts rumors, sets off panic, undermines public support. Undermines morale!

PERCY: Exactly!

(Percy nods to Toby to continue the story.)

TOBY: Perhaps I've already said too much.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* But as a fellow military man, I'm sure you'll appreciate the difficulty we're in.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Absolutely. Confidentiality must be observed at all levels.

TOBY: We knew you'd understand.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: But, please, back to your story...just between us military men.

TOBY: My story? Right. Where was I...?

PERCY: Uh, the part about the cannibals.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(To Toby.)* With the poisoned spears!

TOBY: Right! And the shrunken heads of their enemies around their necks—

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Apparently, those parts weren't good to eat.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: No wonder this was never reported! Men would mutiny if they knew about this!

TOBY: *(Continues.)* So there we are...completely surrounded, poison spears raining down from the trees, our commanding officer goes down—

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Such a shame.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* Then all our other officers go down—

COLONEL BRAMPTON: For Queen and Country! I hope they got a proper memorial.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* Even our drummer boy goes down.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Such a good lad. *(Realizes.)* Wait. *(Suspicious.)* I don't recall any mention of a drummer boy.

TOBY: Oh, yes, we had a drummer boy. And a piper in the rear.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Shouldn't the piper be in the front?

TOBY: We found putting the piper in the rear to have a rather commendable effect on preventing stragglers.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Ah, perfectly understandable. Never much cared for the pipes myself. The "devil's wind chimes," we used to call them. Completely unnatural

sound. Ought to be outlawed in any civilized country. But somehow the Scots are quite attached, but then again, it's debatable whether Scotland is a civilized country. Go on. Tell me the rest. I'm on tenterhooks.

TOBY: Right. The rest. *(Continues.)* So I look around and realize I'm the most senior officer left standing—

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* On the left flank. I was on the right flank.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* Quite right. Two flanks. And we're completely outflanked by the cannibals.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: A common enough mistake. Often fatal, I'm afraid.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* And then...a cry goes up from the supply sergeant.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Oh, no! Was he hit, too?

TOBY: No. Well, maybe. I don't really know. *(Continues.)* But we're down to our last bullet, so things are looking mighty grim, indeed.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: A fearful predicament! Doomed, in fact, I'd say! Except here you are to tell the tale!

TOBY: *(Continues.)* And the cannibals...they're screaming and shouting the way cannibals do—

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Can't say as I've met a cannibal. Would rather not, I must say. But I imagine they're quite disorderly.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* But then they start arguing amongst themselves.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Over tactics?

TOBY: *(Continues.)* Over how they intend to eat us for dinner!

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Oh! Already preparing for their after-action reports, so to speak!

TOBY: *(Continues.)* One faction wants to cook us over an open fire. The other faction wants to eat us raw.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Hideous beings! But an opportunity...the enemy distracted, divided.

TOBY: Precisely!

COLONEL BRAMPTON: So what did you do?

TOBY: *(Continues.)* What else could we do? I told my men to lock bayonets and prepare to charge on my command!

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Entirely right. Never retreat. Never surrender! The best defense is a good offense!

TOBY: *(Continues.)* And that's when Percy and I mounted the elephants and led a cavalry charge right through their ranks!

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Shades of Hannibal himself! A cavalry charge by elephant! I've never heard of such a thing.

PERCY: And you won't since the official reports redacted all of this...to cover up the part about the cannibals in the Punjab.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: A necessary precaution to maintain public order, but such a sacrifice for all those men who must now go unrecognized for their bravery under fire.

TOBY: *(Continues.)* And did I mention how we circled around and then came charging back and had the elephants stomp out the cannibals? We were back on our stomping ground, you might say. *(Laughs.)*

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Oh, yes, we really put our *foot* down! *(Laughs.)*

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* All four feet! *(Laughs.)*

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* More like eight, really. Four for each elephant.

TOBY: *(To Colonel, continuing.)* And the ones the elephants couldn't stomp, they speared with their tusks!

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Just like a shish kebab! Or maybe it's "shish kabob." I'm never quite certain.

TOBY: *(To Colonel, continuing.)* And the ones they couldn't spear, they picked up with their trunks and flung away...the way you or I would fling away the nub end of a cigar!

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* And that was the end of the cannibal tribe of the Punjab.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* "The Great Pachyderm Putsch of the Punjab"! That's what we called it!

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Except, of course, in the press accounts, which were completely silent.

TOBY: *(To Colonel.)* I hear the generals bought off the newspaper reporters with Jamaican rum, but I can't personally confirm that.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: And all this really happened?

(Awkward pause.)

TOBY: On my honor as a gentleman.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* Every bit of his honor...and mine.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Well, then...I suppose it is. *(To Toby.)* Congratulations, my boy, congratulations. *(To Percy.)* And congratulations to you, too, my boy. Congratulations. Well done, all around. I know you can't talk about it, but between you and me, you may have just saved the Empire right there. The Punjab is the key to everything! Lose the Punjab, we lose all of India. Lose India, we lose all of Asia. We may as well lose the crown jewels themselves! Colonel Arthur Brampton, retired, at your service. What do you say we go have a drink? It's on me. May I?

(Colonel puts his arms around Toby and Percy.)

TOBY: Well, I suppose, if you insist.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* It would be an honor, sir.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Consider it a Christmas present. And while we're at it, I want you to explain to me why two lads of your obvious martial character aren't still serving. The Empire needs more young men like you. Daring! Dashing! There are some more "D"-words for you. Can you forgive me for doubting you? Old military reflex kicks in when presented with intelligence from the field. Question everything. But I don't question you lads anymore. I can tell you are the real deal. I can feel it in my

old infantry bones. (*Colonel exits with Toby and Percy.*
Blackout.)

SCENE 5

(AT RISE: Inside the Oxford Street Gentlemen's Club. Rose and Lily enter, furtively. They are dressed like men. Both are wearing very bad fake mustaches. Lily has fake sideburns as well.)

LILY: (To Rose.) This isn't going to work.

ROSE: What do you mean? It's worked so far.

LILY: We snuck in through the kitchen. I don't think I'd call that working.

ROSE: Perhaps. But did you see all the food they laid out? They have more food down there than you and I have ever eaten in a whole lifetime.

LILY: Was that a pheasant...or a just a very large goose? Because I'm not sure I'd know the difference once they're roasted.

ROSE: I don't know. They took all the feathers off. I guess that's how the rich people do it. They're too good to eat the feathers. Poor girls like us...we eat the feathers and all.

LILY: (Disgusted.) You eat the feathers?

ROSE: What? You mean you're not supposed to?

LILY: I think they're just for picking your teeth with...assuming you have anything to pick out in the first place.

ROSE: If they have a spread like that today, can you imagine what they must do for a Christmas feast?

LILY: Our idea of a Christmas feast is— (Thinks.) Well, actually, I don't think we've ever had a Christmas feast.

ROSE: We have come to the right place, Lily. We have come to the right place for sure.

LILY: But did we have to come... (Indicating disguise.) ...like this?

ROSE: Consider it a blow we're striking against the patriarchy!

LILY: I consider it risky and uncomfortable. And I'm pretty sure this mustache isn't going to convince anybody.

ROSE: It's the fashion nowadays. And we are two of the most fashionable young men in London, thank you very much.

LILY: Nobody's going to believe us.

ROSE: Nonsense! At Christmas, everyone wants to believe the best in other people. So, first, we must believe in ourselves. Don't you believe in yourself, Lily?

(Lily is trying to keep her fake mustache on but is having trouble.)

LILY: I believe this fake mustache is going to come off.

ROSE: After all the work we went through to catch that alley cat and give it a shave?!

LILY: We're lucky that alley cat didn't claw our eyeballs out.

ROSE: And that alley cat is lucky it didn't wind up as a meat pie at Mr. Tabby's, so I think we're even.

LILY: Pretty sure the alley cat didn't think things were very even.

ROSE: Cats always have been ungrateful beasts. Remember that calico we tried to harness and use as a hunting cat? It sure wasn't appreciative of the opportunity it was being given.

LILY: I suspect we should be appreciative of what it didn't catch for us.

ROSE: You may be right. This cat seems to have led quite an adventurous life.

LILY: Why do you say that?

ROSE: I can smell it.

LILY: Ewww.

(Rose pulls off her mustache.)

ROSE: Remind me next time not to catch a cat living behind a fishmonger.

LILY: Perhaps, next time, I'll remind you not to catch a cat at all.

ROSE: The glue's rather tasty, though. Probably one of the losers from last year's derby.

LILY: (*Pulls off her mustache.*) Owwww! (*Note: The sideburns remain.*)

ROSE: Funny, that's what the cat said, too. Only much higher pitched and for a much longer period of time.

LILY: I know! I was the one who had to hold him down!

ROSE: Well, I guess we won't be quite as fashionable as we'd hoped to be. But we still have the wardrobe at least.

LILY: Mine is still damp from where it was hanging out on the clothesline.

ROSE: Those people won't miss it, not until they go to bring in the laundry, anyway.

LILY: You realize if we get caught, we're probably going to jail, right?

ROSE: And do you realize if we pull this off, we get to have a Christmas feast?

LILY: You're right. It's worth going to jail over. What do we do next?

ROSE: Try to blend in.

LILY: How?

ROSE: You know what they say, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

LILY: If we were in Rome, we'd both be wearing bed sheets for togas.

ROSE: (*Hears something.*) Quick! Hide behind that plant!

LILY: I'm not sure that's the kind of blending in I had in mind.

ROSE: Somebody's coming!

LILY: Wasn't that always the plan, though? That somebody would be coming? You said we'd sneak in here, we'd pass ourselves off as gentlemen, and then they'd give us whiskey and brandy and cigars. And I said, "What about food? We can't eat cigars." And you said we did that one time when we nicked them off that fellow in Leicester Square. And I reminded you we both wound up as green as a grocer. And

you said, "No, that wasn't from the cigar. That was from the moldy cheese the night before." And I said, "Oh, wait, somebody is coming." Oh! This is never going to work!

(Rose and Lily hide behind the plants.)

ROSE: This is called, "getting the lay of the land."

LILY: I wasn't expecting the land to be so close by! *(Indicating plant.)* Do you think this is edible? It's rather like salad, don't you think?

ROSE: Why are you asking me? I was the one who thought the cigar would qualify as a vegetable.

(Toby and Percy enter.)

PERCY: *(To Toby.)* That was a close call.

TOBY: On the contrary, dear Percy, that was exactly what we needed!

PERCY: The old man wouldn't stop talking.

TOBY: True, but now we know his whole life story. That's got to be worth something in a place like this.

PERCY: He does seem to place a lot of confidence in us now.

TOBY: And that's why they call us "confidence men." We are men who people have confidence in. At this rate, I suspect we'll soon wind up in Parliament.

PERCY: For the time being, I'm more concerned about winding up in a hangman's noose. Hard to talk your way out of that, especially after they put the bag over your head.

TOBY: Have no fear, my friend, they wouldn't hang a pair of war heroes! Especially now that we have an actual colonel to vouch for us.

PERCY: That was a good yarn you spun...the ambush, the elephants, the Punjab! The old codger ate that up just like those cannibals of yours would have done!

TOBY: The key to any good sales pitch is telling the customer what he wants to hear.

PERCY: Oh, so the old man is a customer, now is he? Going all mercantile and bourgeois on us, are you?

TOBY: Well, it sounds better than to say “target” or “victim,” wouldn’t you agree? More high-class. And we are nothing if not high-class.

PERCY: We are definitely that. Although, you might want to make a few minor changes to your story.

TOBY: Changes?

PERCY: Improvements, actually.

TOBY: What are you now, a theatre critic?

PERCY: Seems like a good career move. Indoor work...a cushy chair. Sit back and be entertained and then get paid to criticize it. What’s not to like?

(Lily sneezes.)

TOBY: What’s that?

(Toby goes to investigate. Percy ignores the sneeze and keeps talking.)

PERCY: Quite likely an ambush. Now, here’s what I was thinking: Instead of cannibals with poisoned spears—that doesn’t make much sense because not even cannibals would want to poison their meat—I was thinking instead of cannibals, maybe headhunters because they probably would use poison spears—

(Lily sneezes. Toby pulls back the plant, revealing Lily.)

TOBY: *(Startled.)* Oh!

LILY: *(To Rose.)* Sorry. I think I’m allergic to the sideburns.

(Toby pulls back the other plant, revealing Rose.)

TOBY: *(To Lily and Rose.)* Who are you two?

ROSE: (*Husky voice.*) Merely two gentlemen, I assure you.

(*Skeptical, Rose eyes up Toby and Percy.*)

LILY: (*To Toby, in a husky voice.*) Two gentlemen from Verona!
(*Rose gives her a look. Normal voice.*) What? (*Realizes. To Rose.*) Was that the wrong thing to say?

PERCY: (*To Toby, indicating Lily.*) I like this one. He has class.

LILY: Sometimes we collect old playbills. Lots of fiber!
(*Realizes. To Rose, normal voice.*) Oh, maybe I shouldn't have said that, either.

PERCY: But what are you doing hiding back there?

TOBY: (*Stage whisper.*) They heard everything! (*To Lily.*) You did hear everything, didn't you?

LILY: (*Husky voice.*) No, no, no. We didn't hear anything

TOBY: (*To Percy, indicating Lily and Rose.*) They heard everything!

LILY: (*Husky voice.*) I definitely didn't hear anything about how you had conned some old man by making up stories about serving in India or some such. (*Realizes. To Rose, normal voice.*) Oh, I definitely shouldn't have said that, should I?

PERCY: (*To Toby.*) Don't you agree that the part about the cannibals is a bit much? Not particularly realistic. A good con job has to sound realistic.

TOBY: Con job?! I don't think you appreciate the gravity of the situation here.

PERCY: Technically, no one appreciated gravity until Sir Isaac Newton came along.

LILY: (*Husky voice.*) He's the fellow with the apple, right? I'd have probably just eaten the apple and not wondered about where it came from.

TOBY: (*To Percy.*) You're missing my point! (*Indicating Lily and Rose.*) These two blokes are on to us! We're ruined! Ruined, I tell you!

PERCY: So, in other words, back to where we started. Oh, well, easy come, easy go. We had a good run while it lasted.

ROSE: (*Realizes.*) Wait. Are you—?

PERCY: Likely to starve on the streets? Probably.

TOBY: (*To Rose.*) Look, perhaps we can come to some understanding here—

ROSE: I know you!

PERCY: (*To Toby.*) Why, hear that, Tobe! Apparently, your fame from battling cannibals with poison spears precedes you!

ROSE: I know both of you!

PERCY: Why, yes, I did ride an elephant into battle, but I try not to talk about it much. What happens in the Punjab stays in the Punjab.

ROSE: You're from the orphanage!

TOBY: I have no idea what you're talking about.

ROSE: (*To Toby.*) You're the one who told the new lads that the gruel was really rat-bone stew so they wouldn't eat it and you could have seconds!

TOBY: (*Chuckles.*) Such gullible lads. Everybody knows authentic rat-bone stew tastes much better than that gruel.

ROSE: (*To Percy.*) And you're the one who volunteered for extra kitchen duty, and nobody could figure out why until the porridge started tasting like sawdust, and we discovered it really was sawdust.

PERCY: Some would say that it was an improvement.

LILY: (*To Rose.*) Wait. So what was he doing with the real porridge?

PERCY: Oh, there never was any real porridge. We just signed up for kitchen work because it was the only way to stay warm in the winter.

LILY: So what were we eating all that time?

PERCY: You don't want to know, but, trust me, at least the sawdust was something *natural*.

LILY: Hmm. I wonder what real porridge tastes like, then.

ROSE: Forget the porridge! (*Indicating Toby and Percy.*) Do you know who these two rascals are?

TOBY: Rose?

PERCY: Lily?

ROSE: Toby!

LILY: Percy!

ROSE/LILY/TOBY/PERCY: What are you two doing here?
(*Pause.*) We could ask you the same thing!

PERCY: (*To Rose and Lily.*) Can't you see? We're gentlemen now.

ROSE: Yeah, well, so are we.

TOBY: No, you are dressed up as a gentleman.

ROSE: Isn't that what being a gentleman is all about?

TOBY: (*Looks her up and down.*) Not even very well, I might add.

ROSE: I mean, when we showed up at the door dressed as ladies, they threw us out. We came back as men, and here we are. So I'm thinking the only thing between you getting in and us getting thrown out is the dress code.

TOBY: Um, I'm pretty sure it's more than that.

LILY: Also, we snuck in dressed like this, so I'm pretty sure that doesn't count.

ROSE: (*To Toby and Percy.*) So why are you two dressed up as gentlemen, anyway?

TOBY: We should be asking you the same question!

PERCY: (*To Rose.*) In fact, I daresay we should ask it. It does deserve a reasonable line of inquiry under the circumstances.

ROSE: (*Husky voice.*) I'll have you know that we are gentlemen...young landed gentry from the North Country.

LILY: (*To Percy and Toby, husky voice.*) Here to introduce ourselves to London society.

ROSE: (*To Percy and Toby.*) And make sure we have a warm place to spend Christmas.

LILY: (*To Percy and Toby.*) And a feast. We've never actually had a Christmas feast. Have you?

PERCY: Never, actually. I wonder what it's like...

TOBY: Goose, duck, pheasant, ruffed grouse...a whole flock of roasted birds there for the taking.

PERCY: *(To Rose and Lily.)* And by taking, Toby means he intends to stab it with a fork and hightail it for the exit.

TOBY: *(To Rose and Lily.)* That's only if we're found out. Otherwise, I mean to stay for brandy and cigars.

LILY: Cigars are not a vegetable...just so you know.

TOBY: *(To Rose and Lily.)* But we're not going to be found out. We now have Colonel Brampton, himself, to vouch for us.

PERCY: *(To Rose and Lily.)* He might even give us a letter of introduction. We could go to every club in London...make the rounds, hit them all. We'd be the toast of the town! Perhaps even with a rasher of bacon on the side!

TOBY: *(To Rose and Lily.)* But, first, we have to establish ourselves at this establishment. So if you'll just be running along, we can go on about our business.

ROSE: Run along? Why would we do a thing like that?

TOBY: Because you're horning in on our territory, that's why. Now, get! Go...scoot...scram...skedaddle!

LILY: I'm not sure what a "skedaddle" is, but I know it's hard to run in boots like these.

PERCY: I believe what he's saying is that we have a monopoly on this particular location. Now, if you'll kindly vacate the premises so that we might carry on with our affairs...

ROSE: And who exactly gave you this monopoly?

LILY: Is the government assigning those now? You probably have to be well-connected to even apply for a license.

ROSE: The government's not giving out licenses for fraud.

LILY: Well, what is Parliament doing all day, then?

ROSE: *(To Toby and Percy.)* We have as much right to be here as you do.

LILY: *(To Toby and Percy.)* Which is precisely none, but we'll overlook that for the moment.

TOBY: But we were here first.

ROSE: What's that got to do with it? It's a free country. We can defraud who we like.

PERCY: Perhaps we could combine forces.

TOBY: Why would we want to combine forces with a bunch of girls?

ROSE: Um, because we're smarter and more creative?

TOBY: No, definitely not that.

ROSE: Oh, I definitely think that.

LILY: *(To Percy.)* Yeah, it's more difficult for us to dress up as gentlemen than you, so I think we definitely win on the creativity scale.

TOBY: The fake facial hair says otherwise.

ROSE: It's not fake. It was very real on the cat.

PERCY: You know, if we all work together, we'd have more people to grab food when they finally catch on to us.

LILY: And more people to eat it, although maybe that's not a selling point.

TOBY: *(To Percy.)* They won't catch on to us...unless these amateurs get involved and give us away.

ROSE: *(Insulted.)* Amateurs? Amateurs?! I'll have you know, we make good money at this!

LILY: Well, not that good, or we wouldn't still be living on the streets.

(Colonel Brampton enters.)

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Tut-tut! *(Indicating Rose and Lily.)*
Who do we have here?

ROSE: *(Husky voice.)* Good evening, sir, may I have the honor to introduce myself? I am—

COLONEL BRAMPTON: *(Suspicious.)* I don't know who you are.

LILY: *(Husky voice.)* That's why she was about to tell you.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Don't tell me we've admitted more new members without my knowledge or consent! *(To Rose and Lily.)* Who are you?

ROSE: (*Husky voice.*) Well, as I was saying, I am —

LILY: (*Husky voice.*) You tell him! (*Stage whisper, normal voice.*)
What was my name again?

TOBY: (*To Colonel, indicating Rose and Lily.*) Sir, these co-called gentlemen are flagrant imposters!

PERCY: (*To Colonel.*) Actually, they're old war buddies of ours —

ROSE: (*Husky voice.*) That's right, war buddies! We were in the Crimea together!

PERCY: (*Correcting.*) The Punjab!

ROSE: (*To Colonel, husky voice.*) And the Punjab! All those exotic places.

LILY: (*To Colonel, husky voice.*) Remember the Charge of the Light Brigade? We were in the heavy brigade...more in the back...way in the back.

TOBY: (*To Colonel, indicating Rose and Lily.*) These two are not gentlemen, and I can prove it!

ROSE: (*Husky voice.*) Uh...well...uh —

LILY: (*To Toby, husky voice.*) I don't think there's any need for that!

PERCY: (*To Colonel, indicating Toby.*) What my friend, here, means to say is that these two gentlemen... (*Indicating Lily and Rose.*) ...may not be gentlemen in the traditional sense of the word, but they are every bit gentlemen in another sense of the word and — (*Stage whisper.*) You might want to help me out here, Toby!

TOBY: Oh, I'll help you out! (*To Colonel, indicating Rose and Lily.*) These are just orphans off the street dressing up as gentlemen, so they can sneak into this venerable club and eat some of our Christmas feast! It's thievery, pure and simple!

ROSE: Oh, yeah? (*To Colonel, indicating Toby and Percy.*) Well, so are they! (*Indicating Toby.*) This isn't Lord Whatever He Said His Name Was. This is Toby, and this is Percy. And we were all at the same orphanage in the East End. And if it

hadn't been for me and Lily, here, they'd have been the most incorrigible orphans in all of England!

LILY: *(To Colonel, indicating Toby and Percy.)* They were so bad, the workhouses kicked them out and said they'd rather pay wages to the most hardened inmates from Newgate Prison than deal with those two scalawags again— *(Realizes.)* No, wait, that's what they said about us. Never mind.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Humph. I should have suspected as much. Cannibals in the Punjab? A likely story! *(To Toby and Percy.)* I can't believe you'd try to snooker an old man like that. Can't believe an old man let himself get snookered...and by the likes of you! You! You're a disgrace!

TOBY: *(Indicating Rose and Lily.)* Don't believe them! They'll tell you anything you want to hear!

COLONEL BRAMPTON: And, apparently, they're not alone!

TOBY: No, I swear it! Lies! All lies!

ROSE: Spread by your competitors!

LILY: You know, that whole collaboration thing looks a whole lot more appealing right now, don't you think?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: Well, none of it matters, anyway.

PERCY: Oh, so we're all forgiven, then? Let bygones be bygones?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I mean, there is no Christmas feast.

TOBY: No Christmas feast?! How can there be no Christmas feast?

ROSE: I'm feeling cheated. Aren't you feeling cheated, Lily?

LILY: Very cheated. Can I take these fake sideburns off now?

COLONEL BRAMPTON: The club is always closed at Christmas. Supposedly, some people have families to go to. Humph.

ROSE: We don't.

PERCY: *(To Colonel.)* No, none of us.

LILY: *(To Colonel.)* That's sort of the very definition of being an orphan.

COLONEL BRAMPTON: I'll let the doorman deal with the lot of you. I'm going home. *(Exits.)*

ROSE: *(To Lily.)* No Christmas feast?

LILY: But the whole reason we snuck in here was to find a Christmas feast.

ROSE: That's like saying there's no Christmas!

LILY: Guess it's back on the streets to beg for alms and chase pigeons again...

PERCY: Oh, you like pigeons, do you? I prefer a nice roasted starling myself.

LILY: *(To herself.)* I don't even know what an "alm" is. I hope it's edible.

PERCY: *(Continuing.)* Some find starlings rather bland. I do confess, pigeons are a tad more flavorful, but I've always been somewhat skeptical of what those flavors might be, if you catch my drift.

LILY: *(To herself.)* Although that's never really stopped us before.

TOBY: *(To Rose and Lily.)* You know this is all your fault, don't you? Things were going perfectly fine until you two showed up!

VOICE: *(Offstage, shouts.)* Get out and stay out!

(Blackout. Curtain. Intermission, opt.)

ACT II
SCENE I

(AT RISE: *Streets of London.*)

VOICE: (*Offstage, shouts.*) Get out! And stay out!

(*Rose, Lily, Percy, and Toby stumble on, as if being shoved. They look dejected.*)

ROSE: (*To Lily.*) Well, that didn't exactly work out like we planned it.

LILY: To be fair, our plan was a little light on the details.

ROSE: Things were going so well, too. At least we ran into people. Ever notice how it's always people who cause all the problems? (*Glares at Toby.*) Other people.

TOBY: You know this is your fault, right?

ROSE: My fault? How?

TOBY: (*Indicating Lily.*) And hers.

LILY: Good to know I have more than just sidekick status.

TOBY: (*To Lily and Rose.*) We totally had that old man in our corner until you two came along and ruined everything.

PERCY: In actuality, you were the one who revealed their true identities. Perhaps if you'd chosen to play along with their little ruse, things might have worked out differently.

TOBY: Their little ruse, as you call it, was never going to work.

PERCY: Perhaps...perhaps not. But it didn't fail until you made it fail.

TOBY: Whose side are you on here?

PERCY: Presently the outside, which is exactly the opposite of what we all had planned, if I understand their scheme correctly.

ROSE: So, who's up for a nice Christmas dinner of roasted pigeon? (*Toby, Percy, and Lily glare at her.*) Right. Starling,

then? *(They glare at her.)* English sparrow for more refined tastes? *(They glare at her.)* What's the matter? We can't let one little setback knock us back on our heels. We need to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and move on to the next great adventure.

PERCY: We could always try another club. Now that we have our story down, it should go a lot easier the next time around, eh?

LILY: We never got a chance to tell our story, which is probably just as well.

TOBY: Doesn't matter. They're probably all closed on Christmas day, "so members can spend the day with their family."

LILY: Who knew that family would be so important to people? *(Realizes.)* Oh, right, we're orphans. We wouldn't know about such things.

PERCY: Colonel Brampton seemed rather disappointed. I wonder if he even has a family to go home to?

LILY: Wow. Do you think he's an orphan, too?

TOBY: He's not an orphan. He's just a lonely old man who likes to sit by the fire and tell stories.

PERCY: And hear them. You really had him going there for a while.

TOBY: I did, didn't I? Really melted the old man's heart.

PERCY: Tugged at his heartstrings, you did.

TOBY: Had him eating out of my hand!

LILY: Eating. Ugh! I'm so hungry!

TOBY: *(To Percy.)* He believed every word of that story!

PERCY: I believe it's called, "rapt attention" because you had him wrapped around your little finger. Or all ten of them, actually.

TOBY: Even though not a single word of it was true.

PERCY: Well, it's true there are elephants. All the rest was questionable.

TOBY: Imagine...being able to hold such power over someone with just the power of words.

PERCY: A real master of the trade you are.

TOBY: If only there was a way to put that skill to practical use.

PERCY: I rather thought we were— (*Slight pause.*) How shall I put this politely? Trying to find us some supper.

TOBY: Higher, Percy, higher! We need to think higher!

PERCY: When you're an orphan on the street, pretty much anything is higher.

TOBY: What can I do where I can make up stories out of thin air and have people believe them and shower me with riches as a reward?

PERCY: Well, I was going to say the theatre until you got to the part about being showered with riches.

TOBY: I've got it! I'll go into politics!

PERCY: Don't be ridiculous, Toby. Nobody's going to vote for some fast-talking, flim-flam artist just because of his innate personal charm and the fact that he's telling people exactly what they want to hear. (*Realizes.*) You are *so* going into politics! So what are we...Whigs or Tories? Are we going to be the party of graft and corruption, or the party of waste, fraud, and abuse? Because both seem to have a lot going for them, actually.

ROSE: Sorry to interrupt your little political convention here, but I think we have more pressing matters than your campaign manifesto.

TOBY: (*Announcing.*) "Vote for Toby. The Lesser of Two Evils."

PERCY: I think in our case it's more like, "The evils of two lessers."

TOBY: Oh, that would work, too.

PERCY: That would play up your humble origins. Voters may like that kind of thing...attract the sympathy vote.

TOBY: "Toby and Percy: Two Lessers—"

ROSE: And two evils. Now, listen, it's almost Christmas. We have nothing to eat and no place to stay. What are we going to do about that, Mister Parliamentarian?

TOBY: Oh, that. I'll blame the government! Or better yet, the opposition!

PERCY: A time-honored tradition...evade responsibility, blame somebody else. I believe that's what they call "leadership."

LILY: I'm hungry.

TOBY: Yeah, I am, too. It was all just a dream, anyway.

PERCY: A midwinter's daydream!

ROSE: So we need a new plan.

LILY: We could go back to begging on street corners.

TOBY: We've tried that. There's no money in begging.

PERCY: Indeed, four of five experts agree it's better to stand there rattling a tin cup. I think it's the rattle that's key...

TOBY: *(Gets an idea.)* Stealing! Now, there's money in stealing.

PERCY: *(Continuing.)* The problem with rattling a tin cup is you have to have a tin cup to begin with...

TOBY: Of course, there's also a hangman's noose.

PERCY: *(Continuing.)* And something that can rattle...

TOBY: Face it, we don't have a ghost of a chance of escaping this grinding poverty that we were unlucky enough to be born into.

ROSE: *(Gets an idea.)* A ghost!

PERCY: Somehow that Dickens fellow manages to make poverty seem so...so noble...so uplifting...

ROSE: Dickens!

PERCY: *(Continuing.)* ...glamorous even.

LILY: I'm pretty sure that's why they call it fiction.

PERCY: Ironic, isn't it? Writing about poverty has made him rich and famous, but living it seems to pay no dividends.

ROSE: That's it!

TOBY: I must admit, Percy has summed up the state of contemporary society very well.

ROSE: No, not that. Well, he's right about that, but that's beside the point.

PERCY: I rather thought my critique of mid-19th century capitalism was very much on point.

ROSE: I've got it! I've got a plan! The plan to end all plans!

LILY: I thought your last plan was the plan to end all plans.

ROSE: That was a different plan. This is a new plan.

LILY: Ah, good planning.

TOBY: *(To Rose.)* Your last plan ended our plans.

PERCY: *(To Rose.)* By any chance, does this plan involve finding us a Christmas feast and a warm place to sleep?

ROSE: Yes, it does!

PERCY: Then count me in.

ROSE: At least indirectly...

PERCY: That sounds like a loophole to me, but I'm still willing to hear you out. Aren't you willing to hear her out, Toby?

TOBY: I would, except all I can hear is my stomach growling.

LILY: I thought that was *my* stomach.

PERCY: *(To Rose.)* So what is this mysterious plan of yours?

ROSE: Lady Crumblebum!

PERCY: Why, yes, that sounds very much like a plan, not a particularly detailed one.

TOBY: I don't get it.

PERCY: Of course, you don't. She hasn't laid it out yet. She's just given us a category heading, "Lady Crumblebum." It's supposed to intrigue us...entice us.

TOBY: Well, it hasn't done any of those things for me because I have no idea who Lady Crumblebum is.

ROSE: Lady Crumblebum is a rich old lady who lives at the end of the street.

LILY: Isn't she the mean one?

ROSE: She might have a bit of a personality, yes.

LILY: As I recall, Colonel Brampton had some strong feelings about her.

TOBY: Colonel Brampton had strong feelings about lots of things.

PERCY: Right bit of an old taskmaster he was. Quick with the whip in his day, I imagine. You know what they say, “rum, [buggery], and the lash.” Or is that just in the Navy? [opt.]

LILY: If I remember correctly, he said that she was “a horrid creature who sent shivers down his spine.”

PERCY: Well, that’s rather harsh. Wouldn’t you say that’s rather harsh?

LILY: What he actually said was that he would, quote, “rather face a choice between getting trapped in quicksand, falling into a nest of vipers, or being cornered by hungry tigers raised on man flesh than endure even a look from that horrid creature.”

PERCY: Okay, perhaps the abbreviated version wasn’t quite so harsh, after all.

TOBY: *(To Rose and Lily.)* Wait. How do you know Colonel Brampton?

ROSE: Let’s just say our paths have crossed before.

PERCY: Oh? Did you serve in the Punjab as well?

TOBY: Enough about the Punjab! *(To Rose and Lily.)* What’s with the rich old lady? How much money does she have?

LILY: More than we do.

TOBY: Everybody has more than we do.

ROSE: So here’s the plan...is everybody ready?

LILY: I doubt Lady Crumblebum is ready.

ROSE: Let’s hope not. So here’s what we do... *(Gestures.)* Come on, gather ‘round. We don’t want anybody to hear.

TOBY: We’re out on the street. Who’s going to hear, anyway?

PERCY: Do you want to miss out on the chance to strike it rich—however improbable the odds—or at least find a decent meal?

TOBY: Well, if you put it that way... *(Toby, Percy, and Lily huddle around Rose. Indistinct mumbling is heard as Rose explains the plan to them. To Rose.)* That’s the craziest thing I’ve ever heard!

PERCY: *(To Rose.)* It is a tad unorthodox...

LILY: *(To Rose.)* Crazier than the time we tried to swipe the collection plates at St. Paul's by dressing up as angels.

ROSE: In hindsight, maybe blowing a trumpet to announce our presence wasn't the most subtle approach...

TOBY: There's no way I'm doing that. It's ridiculous, it's demeaning, and it definitely won't work.

PERCY: For what it's worth...neither has anything else we've tried.

ROSE: So are you in?

TOBY: Yeah, I'm in. So who's the first one down the chimney? *(Rose, Lily, and Percy shoot him a look.)* I shouldn't have asked, should I?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Inside the home of Lady Crumblebum. There is a large fireplace and chimney and four doors that can open and close.)

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: *(To "mice," shouts.)* Get out! And stay out! *(To herself.)* Blasted mice! Always scritch and scratching, trying to come in here and steal my cheese. *(To "mice.")* That's my cheese, you little rascals! My cheese! You hear me? My cheese! *(Realizes. To herself.)* Oh, maybe I shouldn't have told them I have some cheese. Oh well, they probably know, anyway. Infernal mice know everything. They hide in the walls and hear everything. Little spies, they are. I wish I had a cat. Haven't seen my cats ever since that meat pie shop opened up down the street. Don't understand why. They were getting plenty fat on mice here. Ungrateful beasts! *(A rattling noise in the chimney is heard.)* Oh, there's another one. *(Shouts.)* Go on, mouse! Go on! *(Louder rattling noise is heard.)* Oh, that's a big one! Might even be a rat! Better get the fire tongs for that one. *(To "rat.")* I'll pick you right up and toss you into the fire! Turn all that scritch and scratching into sizzling and snapping! Or maybe I'll go for the poker. Spear you with the pointy end and then roast you. Or smash your little brains out. That'll teach them a lesson...or at least that one. We'll find out how well all the others learn. Maybe I should put its head on a pike like they did in the old days. *(Nostalgic.)* Ah, the good old days...

(Toby comes down the chimney dressed as the Ghost of Jacob Marley, wrapped with chains, locks, and moneyboxes.)

TOBY: Owww!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: What in the devil?

TOBY: (*Shouts up the chimney.*) Hey, that's a lot further down than you said it would be! (*Dusts himself off. To Lady Crumblebum.*) Oh, hello. You must be Lady Crumblebum.

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: I didn't hire a chimney sweep!

TOBY: Oh, I'm not a chimney sweep. Nasty work. Don't much care for work, actually. Never really saw the point of it, other than that whole earning money for food and shelter thing. Seems a bit of a racket, if you ask me. (*Mumbling is heard from inside the chimney. Calls up the chimney.*) Oh, right, that! (*To Lady Crumblebum.*) I'm the Ghost of Jacob Marley! Boo!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: I don't know any Jacob Marley.

TOBY: (*As Ghost of Jacob Marley.*) That's because I'm dead! See! I'm a dead man! Boo!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: Bosh! All men are dead to me.

TOBY: (*As Ghost of Jacob Marley, trying to be scary.*) I'm a ghost! Ooooh! Scary! Don't you think I'm scary?

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: Well, I don't care if you're Santa Claus. If you're not here to clean the chimney, then get out!

TOBY: (*As Ghost of Jacob Marley.*) You will be visited by three spirits!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: I don't need any visitors. Visitors just take up time. They just sit and talk and drink my tea. I don't like people who talk. Come to think of it, I don't like people, period.

TOBY: (*As Ghost of Jacob Marley.*) You have one chance to avoid my fate!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: (*Continuing.*) They drink my tea and eat my cheese. And worst of all, they take up my time. They're worse than all the mice in the woodwork put together!

TOBY: (*As Ghost of Jacob Marley.*) Heed their warning!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: You heed mine! Now, shoo! Go on!

TOBY: (*As Ghost of Jacob Marley.*) I'm a ghost! I'm here to scare you! Am I scaring you? (*Tries his hardest to be scary.*) Boo! Boo! Boo!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: Nothing scares me. Nowadays, I'm the one doing all the scaring. People go to the other side of the street to avoid me. The children run from me when they see me coming. I like it better that way...the scary old lady at the end of the street. Boo!

(Scared, Toby jumps.)

TOBY: *(Shouts up the chimney.)* I don't think it's working!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: I don't know why you're wearing that crazy getup, anyway. Is that the fashion nowadays?

TOBY: *(As Ghost of Jacob Marley.)* No. *(Points.)* These are locks and chains, see? *(Points.)* And these are supposed to be moneyboxes.

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: Well, let me tell you something, young man. You can fill all those moneyboxes up to the brim, and they still won't bring you happiness in your old age.

TOBY: *(As Ghost of Jacob Marley.)* It's from Dickens. You know Charles Dickens, right? "A Christmas Carol"?

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: I'll give you the dickens if you don't get out! Now, go! Or I'll have to use the fireplace poker! Don't make me use the poker!

TOBY: *(As Ghost of Jacob Marley.)* I'm going! I'm going! *(Shouts up the chimney.)* Anytime now!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: You know why it's called a poker? Because it pokes!

TOBY: *(As Ghost of Jacob Marley.)* I'm going! I'm going as fast as I can! *(Indicating a door.)* Is this the way out?

(Toby opens the door, exits into a closet, and shuts the door.)

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: One, two, three—

(Toby opens the door.)

TOBY: Sorry, I guess that's a closet.

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: I said, get out! And stay out! *(Toby exits through another door, which is later revealed to be another closet. As Lady Crumblebum looks in Toby's direction, Rose enters through the chimney, dressed as the Ghost of Christmas Past. To herself.)* Government ought to do something about these hucksters. Bad enough when they go door to door. Now they're dropping in from the chimney! There oughta be a law. There oughta be a lot of laws.

(Lady Crumblebum turns and sees Rose.)

ROSE: *(As Ghost of Christmas Past.)* Boo!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: *(Annoyed.)* Now, who are you, and what do you want?

ROSE: *(As Ghost of Christmas Past.)* I'm the Ghost of Christmas Past!

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: I don't care about Christmas.

ROSE: *(As Ghost of Christmas Past.)* Oh, everyone should care about Christmas, especially if you don't have one.

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: Besides, you look like an orphan.

ROSE: *(As Ghost of Christmas Past.)* I do? I mean, I do. I am. I mean, I'm a ghost.

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: You've got soot all over you.

ROSE: *(As Ghost of Christmas Past.)* Oh, thanks.

LADY CRUMBLEBUM: What kind of ghost gets soot all over them?

ROSE: *(As Ghost of Christmas Past.)* Hey, give me a break. It's a hard afterlife.

[END OF FREEVIEW]