Summary

A Vocaloid version of a story told a thousand times.

Notes

Merry Christmas everyone!
I love "A Christmas Carol", so I decided to celebrate the holidays with a fanfic based on it!
I'm surprised a Vocaloid version hasn't been made yet. They're perfect for it!
I decided to put Neru Akita in the main role, partly because I can see her as an angry, bitter
person, and partly as a gift to my best friend who I haven't seen in a while and I hope to
see very soon. He loves Neru X3
Dell Honne was dead.

As dead as a doornail. Killed in a traffic accident.

Did his business partner, Neru Akita, know he was dead? Of course she did. But the irritable businesswoman couldn't be bothered to care. Neru was a cold-hearted miser who didn't like anyone or anything.

On Christmas Eve, she had entered her office building with a briefcase in her hand. She had noticed the sign above her office that said "Akita & Honne Industries"...she never bothered to remove her partner's name from the company. Not even after he died in that fatal car accident.

Neru had sat upon her desk, glared briefly at her assistant, Kaito Shion and grumbled to herself as she began calculating her money. Suddenly, Kaito walked up to her timidly, and said "Um...Ms. Akita, there are two people here to see you..."

"Send them in." said Neru without looking at him.

Two folks immediately entered, a young man and woman, who introduced themselves as Lui Hibiki and Ring Suzune.

"We're here on behalf of the local charity!" said Ring, smiling, "If you would be so kind, would you please donate money to the people who have nowhere to go this holiday season?"

Neru looked at them both, not at all impressed with their offer.

"And what will I gain from this?" she asked.

The duo looked at each other in alarm, evidently having never been asked such a question.

"Well," said Lui, "At a time of year like this, we generally take the time to be charitable; give to the poor and destitute who suffer greatly in this day and age."

"Exactly!" said Ring, "If you give at this time, you'll gain the satisfaction of knowing that you helped hundreds or even thousands of people in need of common necessities and comforts!"

Neru was still unconvinced.

"Are there no prisons? No workhouses?"

"Well, yeah, there are plenty of those." said Lui.

"But most people would sooner drop dead than go there!" said Ring.

"If they'd sooner drop dead then maybe they should do it, the population's big enough already!" scoffed Neru, dismissively. She turned to her assistant.

"Shion, see these two to the door."

Kaito sighed and did as he was told.

"Geeze, who spit in her coffee?" asked Lui in annoyance as he and Ring were escorted out.
Kaito turned to Neru as if he was going to say something, but before he could, the door opened and smacked him in the face.

"Good afternoon, big sister!" shouted a young blond man, smiling at her. It was her younger brother, Nero. "And a merry Christmas to you!"

Neru looked at him and rolled her eyes.

"Merry Christmas!" she scoffed, "Who gave you the right to be 'merry'? You're poor enough."

"Ah, come on, sis!" said Nero with a cheery smile, "We haven't done anything together since Lily..."

Neru glared daggers at Nero and he quickly realized that he was hitting a fairly touchy subject. He shut himself up immediately.

"What I'm trying to say is, mom, dad and I are having a Christmas party and it would mean the world to us if you at least dropped by for a visit!"

Neru glared up at him. "Is Christmas really a time you feel like celebrating?"

"Yes it is." said Nero.

"I'm not going to the party," said Neru, "Not even if you dragged me there would I change my mind."

Nero sighed.

"Well, if you DO change your mind, I'll have a seat open for you at the dinner table."

"Good afternoon."

"I'll see you later sis..."

"Good afternoon."

"And a merry Christm--"

"SHUT UP AND GET OUT!"

Nero immediately scrambled out the door.

Kaito looked at the door and turned to Neru.

"You've been staring at me for two hours, Mr. Shion," said Neru, "What do you want?"

"W-Well," said Kaito, "It's Christmas Eve, ma'am, and I would like to have some time off, just for the holidays?"

"Time off?" asked Neru incredulously, "For the holidays? HA! What for?"

"Just to spend time with my wife and children." said Kaito.

Neru rolled her eyes.

"I don't see why I should..."
"Please, Ms. Akita," pleaded Kaito, "Just for one night! I want to be there with them for the holidays."

Neru stared at him for a moment. She then stood up and stared out the window behind her.

"Have at least half of your work done before nine o'clock tonight. Then you can go."

"R-Really?" said Kaito, lighting up a bit.

"Yes. Now get to work, before I change my mind."

"Yes ma'am! And merry Christmas!"

Neru scoffed, and returned to her own work.

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Neru and Kaito ended their workday at nine and parted ways for home.

When Neru returned to her house, she was about to open the door, when suddenly she noticed the dragon head door knocker.

It looked...different, now.

She stared at the face that was once a dragon's. It was instead a human's.

A very familiar human's

"D-Dell Honne?"

To her alarm, the face's eyes opened and it looked up at her. The face of Dell Honne stared at her.

And then it screamed.

Neru covered her ears and clamped her eyes shut.

When the screaming ended, she looked at the knocker.

It was a dragon's face again.

Neru shook her head.

"Nonsense." she grumbled.

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Neru had had dinner and then changed into her pajamas, sipping tea in her den. All was peaceful and calm as she sat next to the fireplace, ready to retire for the night.

She then felt a cold chill. She looked to the window. It was closed.

The chills continued. She looked around, wondering where it came from. The fire shortly afterward had been snuffed out.

Neru paused. She was now in the dark. She heard a creaking of wheels and a clopping of hooves...almost like a stagecoach was somewhere in her home.
She was starting to panic a little. She didn't know what was happening. She desperately reached for an explanation.

Perhaps the stagecoach was outside. Yes, that must have been it.

Just as she was about to start the fire again, however, she heard another sound...the rattling of chains.

She looked around. There was nothing.

She heard the rattling again and looked once more. Still nothing.

The rattling appeared again, this time continuous and getting steadily louder.

Neru then heard it behind her.

"Boo."

Neru screamed and turned around. For the second time that night, she was staring into the face of her former partner.

She could hardly believe it.

Dell looked exactly as he did when he died, complete with the suit he was buried in and the bandage around his broken wrist. The one thing that stood out was a massive trail of iron chains that rattled all around him. He almost looked like a spider, seated in the center of a web.

But no...no it couldn't have been him. He was dead. Dead and buried.

"Wh-Who are you?" asked Neru, trying to sound brave.

"In life I was your partner, Dell Honne."

"No you're not."

"You do not trust your eyes?"

"No," said Neru, "my eyes could easily be tricked by even the slightest disorder of the stomach. You could simply be an undigested piece of meat, or part of an undercooked potato! There's more gravy than grave with you!"

With that, Dell gave an agonized wail. It lasted for at least a minute and Neru desperately shielded her ears.

"Now do you believe me?"

"YES! YES I DO! Just please, never do that again!"

"I make no promises."

"What do you want with me? And why are you covered in chains?"

Dell's scowling face suddenly turned into a look of horror.

"The chains," he said, sounding agonized, "The chains I formed in life with my acts of greed!"

"Ooh! You mean like that time we evicted that orphanage?" asked Neru fondly at the memory,
"That was the best!"

"Oh," said Dell, looking a bit happier, "Why yes! I do remember that! It was a lot of fuAUUGH!!"

One of the chains spiraled around Dell's neck and began to throttle him.

"I MEAN NO!" he shouted, agonized again, causing the chains to let him go, "I was WRONG! I had done so many terrible things, and as punishment I must walk amongst the living, watching the suffering and agony I had caused and benefited from, never being able to make amends for what I have done and carrying the heavy burden of my greed through these chains for all of eternity!"

"When did you start talking like a Victorian novel?" asked Neru.

"That's not the point," said Dell, "the point is, you wear such chains as mine! Only larger and heavier, as you've had more time to cultivate it! You'll never escape the fate I did unless you do what I say!"

Neru paused and said "I'm listening."

"You will be haunted by three spirits."

"Haunted?" asked Neru, "No thank you! I've had enough haunting for one night!"

"Do you want me to scream again?"

"Continue."

"You will be visited by spirits of the past, present and future. Expect the first tonight, when the bell tolls one."

"I'd rather meet them all at once and be done with it. Can we do that instead?"

Dell smacked her upside the head.

"OW!"

"When the bell tolls one." repeated Dell, irritably, "And I thought it was harder to deal with you when I was alive..."

"I HEARD THAT!"

"You were supposed to. Look to see me no further."

With that, he vanished through the window.

And Neru was alone.

To be continued.
II. Christmas Past

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Neru had had a sleepless night. The visit with the ghost of her partner had shaken her up quite a bit. She had spent the better half of the night expecting a frightful specter to appear in front of her face, just as Dell had.

"When the bell tolls one."

Neru looked at her digital clock. ("What bell?" she asked no one in particular.)

The clock said "12:59". Just one minute more. Neru stared intently at the clock. Waiting for the clock to change. And waiting for the first spirit.

Suddenly, she heard a screech in the night. She turned, frightened and expecting the specter to appear. Pulling back the curtain of her bed, she saw not a ghost, but her cat, which had run into a wall chasing a mouse (she really needed to hire an exterminator). Neru then turned to the clock again.

"1:01"

Neru smirked.

"Such stupid nonsense!" she laughed.

"Yeah, I know!" said a high-pitched voice.

Neru screamed and turned to see something emitting a brilliant light. She squinted, attempting to see what was underneath the light. There was what appeared to be a young boy, with longish blond hair and golden eyes. The light seemed to be emitting from his body, which was hard to see, though Neru could vaguely make out the outline of some sort of robe.

"Nero?"

"Nope!" said the boy, smiling.

Neru looked closer. She quickly figured out that he was definitely not her brother. He had several features that looked very different from him, and instead more resembled _her_, with a chin like hers and eyes like hers. His hair looked completely different from Nero's...Neru was beginning to wonder why she had mistaken him for her younger brother in the first place. The Ghost looked more like a younger male version of her.

"Are you the spirit who Dell told me would be visiting me?"

"I am!"

"Who and what are you?"

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past!"

"Define 'past'."

"I'm the Ghost of YOUR Christmas Past!"
"And why are you here, exactly?"
"Your welfare! C'mon, walk with me!"

He immediately took her hand and in an instant, they had transported to a large, snowy schoolyard.

"Hey," said Neru, quite alarmed, "this was my old school!"

"Yep!" said the spirit with a giggle, "We're in your past! These are shadows of what once was, so no one here is aware of our presence!"

"Well that's good," said Neru, who had previously been worried about the possibility of a time travel paradox, "but why are we here?"

"We're going to see a lonely little girl who is in the school!"

Neru froze.

Now she remembered exactly what Christmas the spirit had taken her to.

"Oh...joy..." she muttered as the two of them traveled to the inside of the school.

The spirit led Neru into the school to see an eight year old version of herself. She was seated in the corner of the classroom, crying. Neru sighed sadly.

"I remember this one." said Neru, "I was alone, because my friends left for Christmas break."

"I thought it was because you had no friends." said the spirit.

Neru glared at him and he backed off.

"Well," he said, "don't worry about this! Because look!" he pointed to the door.

Neru brightened up. She remembered what was coming. A tall young woman in a yellow and black coat emerged through the door.

"Neru!" said the woman, smiling at her.

"Lily!" shouted young Neru, smiling back, "You're here to pick me up!"

"Of course!" said Lily, hugging her little sister, "Mom and dad are having the annual Christmas party and they wanted you to be there!"

"I love you, Lily!" said young Neru as she left with her big sister.

"Lily," said the present day Neru, "she was the best big sister."

"She died, if I'm not mistaken?" asked the spirit.

Neru sighed.

"Yes. She did. The very next Christmas. And after she died, I never went to one of mom and dad's Christmas parties again."

"True," said the spirit, "but there was one other party you went to!"
"What?" asked Neru, "Wait...you don't mean...?"

Before Neru could continue, however, she was pulled into the next part of the past. She found herself in a big building with bright colors.

"Do you remember this place?"

"Why yes!" said Neru, excitedly, "This was Big Al's packing and shipping company! Dell and I worked here when we were in college!"

Indeed, younger versions of Dell and Neru were talking to each other after their work was finished. A tall, handsome man burst into the room, laughing heartily.

"And there's Big Al!" said Neru, excitedly, "I haven't seen him in so long!"

"Neru, Dell," said Big Al, "Stop working! It's Christmas Eve, so it's time for a party!"

A blond woman, dressed in white, entered the house. It was Al's wife, "Sweet" Ann. She was followed by several other folks, including a beautiful young woman with long white hair.

Al and Ann were first on the dance floor, as always. They danced exuberantly and excitedly, Ann twirled, Al jumped. He lifted her and dipped her, sometimes SHE dipped or lifted him! Their dancing was swift and graceful, sometimes almost erotic. The guests all cheered and clapped for them.

Dell looked at the young Neru and smiled as he noticed that she was looking at the beautiful white-haired girl, who was currently sampling some of the wine.

"You looking at Haku Yowane?" asked Dell.

"No!" said Neru, blushing.

"Hey, I wouldn't blame you if you were!" said Dell, "She's quite a catch!"

Neru shrugged and said, "I wouldn't stand a chance with her."

"Well you might," said Dell, "if, you know, you TALKED to her."

"I can't!" said Neru.

Dell just rolled his eyes and gently nudged Neru into Haku's direction.

Haku looked at Neru and smiled.

"Hello," she said.

"Uh," said Neru, "M-My name is...uhhh...um..."

"Neru Akita." said Dell.

"What he said." said Neru.

Haku giggled. That was a good sign...possibly.

"My name is Haku Yowane," said Haku, smiling, "I'm friends with Ann."

"I-It's nice to meet you!" said Neru, suddenly, "W-Would you like to dance?"
"I'd love to!" said Haku.

Neru and Haku headed off to dance. Neru looked back at Dell, who grinned and gave her a thumbs up.

The present day Neru smiled as she watched her younger self and Haku dance together.

"There's one more Christmas for us to see..." said the spirit.

A chill went down Neru's skin.

"Please, spirit," she said, "don't show me THAT Christmas."

"I must, I'm sorry." the spirit said, solemnly.

Another Christmas arrived.

A young Neru was seated in her office, writing out some new checks. Haku entered the room, looking at Neru sadly.

"Neru?" asked Haku.

"What is it, Haku?"

"I just wanted to tell you that the new intern, Mr. Shion is here."

"I'll speak to him later."

"Did...Did you hear of what happened to Dell?"

"Hmmm?" asked the past Neru, "Oh, right. That reminds me, I'm not holding a funeral for him."

"WHAT!?" asked Haku, "But...but why!?"

"Do you know how much a funeral would cost?"

"Neru," said Haku, horrified, "for just one night could you PLEASE think of something other than what you could profit from? Dell was your friend! He was my friend too!"

Neru shook her head.

"He would have wanted it this way. He was as much a penny pincher as I am. And if I hadn't saved my money, you wouldn't have had that shiny engagement ring!"

Haku pulled the ring off and through it at her.

"You can keep it. Sell it if you want. You only care about yourself. What do you care if I leave?"

With that, she stormed out. Past Neru just turned her attention back to her checks.

Present Neru's eyes started to well up.

"No! No, go after her, you idiot!" she screamed at the past self she knew couldn't hear her, "She's the best thing that ever happened to you!"

The spirit attempted to place a hand on Neru's shoulder comfortingly.
"Why, spirit? Why must you torment me like this?"

"I told you," he responded, "these are shadows of what once was. They are what they are, I am not to blame."

Neru turned away.

"Leave me, spirit."

The spirit looked at her sadly. Eventually, he vanished, the vibrant light he emitted gone.

Chapter End Notes

Some notes about the ghost:
1. Initially, I wanted all the ghosts to be played by Vocaloids (Oliver as Past, Gumi as Present and possibly Ruko as Future). However, I decided instead to go the route of the Muppet adaptation, as the emotional impact would be better if the ghosts were more like the book.
2. That said, I didn't want to just copy the book, because the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future appear to be unique to Scrooge himself. I decided to go by the idea that each ghost was a part of their subject. So to some degree, each ghost will resemble Neru in some way, but still be intended as their own character. Adding to this, I decided to make the Present and Future ghosts women and the Past ghost a boy, because in most adaptations, Scrooge's specters are male with the exception of Past, who is usually depicted as female (in the book, Past's form was constantly changing and as such, she switched between male and female multiple times). Since all the ghosts are facets of Scrooge's life, it makes sense, so I reversed it with Neru because she's a girl.
3. I decided to keep the basic idea behind each ghost in there to make them recognizable, but I still wanted them to be their own characters. The Ghost of Christmas Past was basically a flickering light with a vaguely humanoid shape underneath the light, and that shape constantly changes, with her limbs multiplying and disappearing at random, her shape going from strong to delicate in seconds, her age fluctuating between old and young and her gender switching between male and female; her clothes were stated to be a white robe, decorated with flowers and she carried with her a candle snuffer in one hand and a sprig of holly in the other. On this baseline, I made Neru's Past spirit a figure covered in a bright light, as light is a major motif with the Past ghost, and decided to make him look somewhat young, as he represents the past.
Neru awoke to the clock beeping at 2:00 AM. She rubbed her eyes and suddenly smelled something...something good.

As she emerged from her bedroom she saw a massive spread of delicious looking food all over the house. Turkey, cake, marzipan, cranberries, pudding and all sorts of holiday themed goodness. And standing on top of it all was a tall, curvy woman with waist-length red hair (with a festive bow in it) and a green dress smiling down at Neru.

"O ho ho ho ho~!" she laughed, "Come in and know me better, dear!"

"Are you the next ghost, ma'am?" asked Neru.

"Of course!" said the spirit, grinning and gesturing toward the bow on her head "I am the Ghost of Christmas Present! Get it? Christmas PRESENT? O ho ho ho ho ho~!"

"You're a little weird, spirit." said Neru.

"Wrong! I am a LARGE weird spirit! O ho ho ho ho~!

Neru could tell she was going to like this one.

"Have you not heard of me?" asked the spirit.

"Not really."

"Well you should have! I have 2015 older sisters!"

"2015? Imagine the electric bills!"

"O HO HO HO HO HO HO HO~! Okay, okay, enough jokes! Let us go off to the here and now!"

With that, the spirit pointed a staff like a flashlight towards what was now a city street.

The first house Neru saw was her parents' house.

It was the Akitas' annual Christmas party and lots of guests had come over. Nero was licking a candy cane with a smile while Mr. and Mrs. Akita were talking with Gackpo and Gumi, two acquaintances of the family.

Neru looked around at how beautiful it all was, with lights everywhere and a big beautiful Christmas tree. She had forgotten how much she used to love these parties.

On the counter nearby, she saw a photograph of Lily, which reminded her of why she stopped going.

Still, the festivities were lovely and Neru couldn't help but enjoy pretending she was joining in, singing and dancing and eating with folks who couldn't see or hear her.
"Let's play charades!" shouted Nero.

"Wonderful idea, Nero!" said Mrs. Akita, "You go first!"

"Okay, who am I?"

Nero slouched in his chair and made an exaggeratedly grumpy face.

"Are you Grumpy Cat?" asked Teto Kasane.

Nero shook his head.

"Ooh ooh! You're the Angry Video Game Nerd!" said Gumi.

Again, Nero shook his head.

"He's a goat?"

Nero rolled his eyes. He then grabbed a ribbon and tied it to his hair.

"OH! I know who you are!" said Kokone, "You're your sister Neru!"

"Right!" shouted Nero.

Everyone laughed. Neru, not bothered in the slightest just raised up her hands and said "It's true, it's true."

The spirit led Neru away from the party to another place, a somewhat more modest looking home.

"Where are we now, spirit?"

"The home of your employee, Kaito Shion."

Neru peered inside. A pretty woman with short brown hair and red clothes was in there, roasting a goose. A blond girl sitting nearby giggled.

"It smells good, mom!" she said.

The woman had taken break from cooking to look at herself in the mirror.

"It does, doesn't it?" she replied, absently.

A young lady with pink hair and another young lady with teal hair arrived from upstairs.

"Meiko," said the teal haired girl, "When will Kaito and Len be home?"

"Soon, Miku," said Meiko, "Don't worry about it!"

"But I'm hungry noooooow!" whined the blond girl.

"Don't whine, Rin." said Meiko, "Luka, will you help with the turkey?"

"Of course." said the pink-haired girl.

Neru sighed. Kaito had never told her that he had such a lovely—and big—family. When he mentioned a wife and children she pictured a typical, nuclear family consisting of a wife, a son and a daughter. But there were also those to young ladies, whose relation was unknown to her.
"Luka is Meiko's cousin," said the spirit, "and Miku is Kaito's sister."

Neru looked up at the spirit.

"Why are they living with Kaito?"

"Miku has lived with him all her life. They have no other family. And Luka had lost her family in a tragedy years ago. Now all they have is each other."

Neru stared into the room sadly. Suddenly, Kaito and a boy with blond hair had emerged through the door.

"Hello everyone!" said Kaito with a smile, letting the boy down.

"DADDY!" shouted Rin as she ran toward him and hugged him tightly.

"ACK! Nice to see you too, Rin!"

Neru took notice of the boy. He walked with a limp and upon closer observation, he was holding a crutch.

"Len!" said Meiko, smiling, "How did you like the Christmas tree lighting in the square?"

"It was fun!" said Len, "But it kind of made me wish we could afford a tree."

"Oh don't worry, Len," said Kaito, "daddy may not have been able to afford a tree, but he could afford a sweet goose!"

"Do you smell something burning?" asked Luka.

"THE GOOSE!" shrieked Meiko.

Pulling some oven mitts on, she ran to the burning bird and pulled it out.

"Oh thank God," said Meiko, breathing like she had just run a marathon, "Okay, it may be a little crispy but otherwise the goose is safe!"

Everyone laughed.

Then, Len coughed.

"Oh dear," said Meiko, noticeably worried, "Len, you got too excited, sit down, sit down."

"I-I'm fine, mom! R-R-Really!"

Neru stared at the boy as he began to settle down a little.

"Spirit...what's wrong with that boy?"

"He is ill, and his illness is not one that can simply go away. Not without the proper medicine."

"What's going to happen to him?"

"I cannot say. My jurisdiction is the present. I can't see what will happen in the future."

Neru shook her head, sadly.
She and the spirit walked together some more. Neru suddenly noticed that the spirit's hair had turned white and her face had gained more lines.

"Have you been aging, spirit?"

"My time here is short, dear. I only live in the present. My life ends tonight."

Neru sighed.

"You taught me so well, ma'am."

"One more thing that I should teach you."

"Ma'am?"

The spirit moved her robe like a curtain to reveal two horrid looking children. Neru's eyes grew wide with horror.

There was a boy, glaring at her, screeching and hissing viciously. There was a girl, staring at her with empty, longing eyes and holding out a begging hand. Both were dressed in tattered, ragged clothing and were pale and disheveled.

"A-Are they yours, spirit?" asked Neru.

"They are man's. And they cling to me. The boy's name is Ignorance. The girl's name is Want. Beware them both."

"B-But don't they have anywhere to go!?"

The boy suddenly flashed her a nasty grin and grew into a vicious looking thug of an adult.

"Are there no prisons?" he sneered, brandishing a knife and swiping it at her, before a noose wrapped around his neck and lifted him into the air.

The girl grew into a hideous woman in a slinky red dress that barely covered her, her face splattered with makeup.

"Are there no workhouses?" she cackled, attempting to grab Neru only to suddenly start shrieking and being dragged away in a straightjacket.

Both "children" vanished into the darkness and the ghost placed a comforting hand on the shaken Neru's shoulder.

"I'm sorry you had to see that, my dear. But remember that you can change the future for children like that."

"But how?" asked Neru.

"You'll see when you meet the next spirit," said the Ghost of Christmas Present, smiling as she faded away, "Go and know her better dear, o ho ho ho ho ho..."

And so Neru was alone.

Just her and her shadow.

Which was growing taller...and taller...and taller...
Chapter End Notes

The Ghost of Christmas Present is not trying to copy Santa, btw. That's supposed to be a "Noblewoman's Laugh".

I included Ignorance and Want because I feel they're fairly important to the Present Ghost's message.

And of course, Len was "lucky" enough to be Tiny Tim.
The shadow now towered over Neru, standing at six feet tall. A long, dark-clothed leg emerged from the shadow upon the wall, planting a sharp stiletto heel upon the ground with a loud clack, and was soon followed by a full body. A truly intimidating woman stood before Neru. She wore a black coat and had long black hair. Her piercing, icy blue eyes glowered down at Neru from above a thick black scarf that covered her mouth.

"A-Am I in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?"

The ghost nodded, but said nothing.

"And you are going to show me what has not happened yet but will happen under certain circumstances?"

The ghost nodded, but was once again silent.

"Ghost of the future," Neru continued, "I fear you more than any other specter I've seen. But because I know you're here to do me good, then lead on."

The ghost pointed in the direction of a courtyard. A group of business men and women she had known were talking among themselves.

"So she died?"

"Yep! She died! It feels like Oz after they killed the witch!"

"When did she die?"

"Christmas Eve. Car crash. She still had her cell phone so she tried to call someone, but no one picked up!"

"I'll probably go to the service if they give out free food."

"I'll probably be a pretty cheap funeral."

Neru stared at these folks, having a sinking feeling in her stomach. The ghost quickly took her aside and pointed toward another area called "Sukone's Pawn Shop".

A woman with white hair sat at the counter, grinning as three individuals arrived.

Neru recognized one as her maid, Lola. The other two were a fair haired woman in a black dress and a dark haired man in a suit.

The white haired woman snickered and said "Well now, her body's not even cold yet and already the money's pouring in!"

Lola scoffed and said "It's not like I'm gonna attend her funeral. I need to get money from somewhere. Here, I feel especially proud to be pawning off her precious cell phone."

The man held out a white ballgown and said "I found this, it must be worth something!"
The woman in black held out some white sheets.

"All I got were her sheets." she said.

The woman behind the counter laughed. Neru felt incredibly disgusted at what all of them were doing. The ghost just shook her head and turned Neru away.

They were now standing in Kaito's house. Meiko was seated next to the stove, a bottle of wine in her hand, eyes red and seemingly not because of the drink in her hand. Luka had arrived and taken the bottle from her hand.

"Meiko," she said, "I think you've had enough."

"I'll, hic, tell you...when...hic...yeah, you're right." Meiko conceded. Miku arrived.

"How's Rin?" asked Luka.

"She finally stopped crying." said Miku, "But she still can't sleep."

"I can't blame her," said Meiko, "it's been hard for all of us."

The door slowly swung open. Kaito stood there with a somber look on his face.

"Kaito!" said Meiko.

Miku and Luka hugged Kaito, who hugged them back calmly.

"Hey guys." he said, emotionlessly, sitting down next to his wife, "Where's Rin?"

"She's in her and len's..." began Miku, before catching herself with misty eyes and saying, "She's in her room."

Kaito sighed.

"I'll talk to her in the morning. I picked out a nice little spot for Len. It's under a tree. Len always loved...Len always loved..."

"He always loved sleeping under shady trees." said Meiko.

Kaito nodded, trying to swallow his sadness.

"I'm gonna go up to my room."

"Are you sure you're okay, Kaito?" asked Luka.

"I'm fine, I'm fine. I just need some time alone."

Neru had been watching this from halfway up Kaito's stairway and he had made it up there, out of sight from his family.

Once he was finally out of their line of sight, Neru observed that he just seemed to fall apart. His now very red eyes began to well up with tears, his lips beginning to quiver. The once vibrant blue color of his hair had been washed out and dulled, as if his entire body had been reacting to his loss. His face was inches away from Neru, but he couldn't see her.

Neru felt her heart break as she watched Kaito walk straight through her, still crying silently to himself over the death of his son.
"Spirit," said Neru, her own eyes welling up as well, "I never wanted any of this to happen."

The ghost stared down at her.

"Please tell me, spirit. Are these the shadows of things that will be or things that may be?"

The ghost just took her hand and directed her to one more place.

A graveyard.

There was one particular grave, completely alone, neglected and evidently never visited.

The ghost pointed at it, but Neru was no fool. She knew whose grave it was.

"Akita Neru"
"Born November 1st, 1988"
"Died December 24th, 2016"

The realization hit her like a ton of bricks.

This was the fate that awaited her.

She was to die, alone and in pain. And after she dies, nobody mourns her and nobody cares about her.

And she only has herself to blame. Her treatment of everyone she knew had effected her more than she ever knew.

And she effected everyone around her in turn. Her pitifully low pay for her own employee had cost him a son, who couldn't afford the medical help he needed.

The spirit laid a hand on Neru's shoulder. She seemed to be trying to console her. But Neru pulled her hand away defiantly.

"No, spirit. I'm not the woman I was. My life can change. I can make all of this right. I will honor Christmas. I will live in the past, present and future. I will never forget the lessons you three have taught me, the punishment my poor partner endured. I will sponge away the writing on that stone, and that of Kaito's son as well. This future will never exist if I can help it!"

The spirit's expression changed. Her sharp, icy eyes became warm and welcoming. She pulled down the scarf covering her mouth and said, with a soft smile...

"Well done, Ms. Akita. The lesson has been learned."

And with that, everything dissolved away.

And Neru looked up to see a bright, vibrant light.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

I had hoped I could finish this by Christmas day. Fortunately, I'll be finishing it before
January (hopefully).
Also, it's my mom's birthday!

The circumstances of Neru's death are altered from Scrooge's (as Neru is younger than Scrooge) but I feel like they'll hopefully fit well into the story. In the book, Scrooge died of a heart attack on Christmas Eve and was said to have been desperately reaching out for someone to help him (but of course he was either alone, or in the company of his maid, who obviously wouldn't have wanted to help him). Of course in the "new" timeline where he's been reformed, he would have almost certainly been in the company of Fred and/or Bob when this happens so it'd be easier for him to get medical attention and thus, survive to see the next Christmas at least. It only took a little bit of tweaking to make Neru's future death an equally common but also avoidable one.
Note from the Author

I may decide to cancel this story.

It's not just the fact that it's not December anymore, but also I can't think of a way to end this without just copying the original ending word for word.

I dunno. I may come back to this story eventually, but for now it's cancelled or at least on hiatus. The good news is that now I can officially continue other stories, so you can look forward to that.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!