

Act I

Scene 1

(A city street of shops and businesses in England, December, 1840. Special: snow. LAMPLIGHTER enters lighting streetlamps. Sound: Church clock strikes three. LAMPLIGHTER sings "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." People enter, going about their business as they join in singing the carol. A PRODUCE SELLER sets her cart, and FRED and CLAIRE buy apples. MRS. CRATCHIT enters with daughters ANNE and MARTHA, who peddles mistletoe and small wreaths, and sons HENRY and TINY TIM, who set up a shoe shine box. LAMPLIGHTER exits. The CLERK gets a shoeshine but refuses to give alms to a BEGGAR. ANNE rushes to a DOLL SELLER with her tray, but MRS. CRATCHIT pulls her to buy potatoes from the PRODUCE SELLER. A GENTLEMAN working with the poor makes notes of peddlers' needs. A CLERGYMAN gets a shoeshine, as CLERK buys apples; NURSE buys greenery from MARTHA; limping, LAUNDRESS buys potatoes; NURSE helps LAUNDRESS. CLERGYMAN greets the BEGGAR, gives him money. Adjustments may be made in the entrances and business in the street scene.)*

ENSEMBLE

(Singing.)

GOD REST YE MERRY, GENTLEMEN
LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY;
REMEMBER CHRIST OUR SAVIOR
WAS BORN ON CHRISTMAS DAY
TO SAVE US ALL FROM SATAN'S POWER,
WHEN WE WERE GONE ASTRAY.
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY,
COMFORT AND JOY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY

NOW TO THE LORD SING PRAISES,
ALL YOU WITHIN THIS PLACE,
AND WITH TRUE LOVE AND BROTHERHOOD
EACH OTHER NOW EMBRACE;
THIS HOLY TIDE OF CHRISTMAS
ALL OTHER DOTH DEFACE.
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY,
COMFORT AND JOY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY.

**Tiny Tim uses a small crutch and wears a leg brace.*

(As crowd business ends, FEZZIWIG enters, wearing his clothes from the “past” and a top hat with bright red band. FEZZIWIG sings a reprise of the chorus with the exiting ENSEMBLE.)

FEZZIWIG, with ENSEMBLE

(Singing.)

O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY,
COMFORT AND JOY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY.

FEZZIWIG (Cont’d)

(Addressing the audience.)

Good tidings, indeed! Miraculous winter days fail to warm only the coldest heart. I myself am a bit of Christmas magic, presenting a tale that must chill our bones in order to make our spirits glow.

(The UNDERTAKER, enters pushing a wood coffin into place, and CLERGYMAN, CLERK and SCROOGE enter to sign a register laid atop the coffin.)

FEZZIWIG (Cont’d)

(Indicating business at the coffin.)

To begin with: Marley was dead. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Old Marley was a dead as a doornail.

(Building the case for the story.)

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course. Scrooge and he were partners for I don’t know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner, which brings me back to the point: there is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story about my former apprentice, a young Ebenezer Scrooge, he who, I must tell you, held much promise for happy success, although,

(UNDERTAKER, CLERK and CLERGYMAN exit with coffin. SCROOGE checks his pocket watch, exits separately.)

FEZZIWIG (Cont’d)

untouched by Marley’s sad death seven years ago, he, who secured undoubted bargain as an “excellent man of business” that very afternoon. Oh! But he was a tightfisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping old sinner! He carried his own low temperature always about with him and not thawing it one degree at Christmas. It’s still so, now, seven years later.

(CLERK and CLERGYMAN enter street separately and meet.)

CLERK

My dear friend, when will you come round to see us?

(SCROOGE enters, and men pause speaking, to avoid him.)

FEZZIWIG

Nobody ever stopped Scrooge in the street.

CLERGYMAN

Before the new year, my good man. Merry Christmas!

CLERK

(Exiting.)

And to you!

(SCROOGE exits. JOHN enters running.)

JOHN

(To Clergyman.)

What is it 'o'clock?

CLERGYMAN

Time to be home, or miss your mum's plum pudding!

JOHN

Thank you sir, Merry Christmas!

(CLERGYMAN and JOHN exit, separately.)

FEZZIWIG

But what did Scrooge care? He liked warning all human sympathy to keep its distance. Until: Once upon a time – on Christmas Eve – the fantastical events I present you, brave witnesses, befell the unwitting Ebenezer Scrooge.

(FEZZIWIG tips his hat in farewell to audience, exits.)

Scene 2

(SCROOGE enters his business, hanging up his hat and coat. CRATCHIT shivers at his desk and sneezes.)

CRATCHIT

I beg pardon, Mr. Scrooge, might I put just one more coal on the fire?

(Sound: the Church clock strikes four.)

SCROOGE

What the devil, Cratchit! Waste a coal late in the afternoon? Humbug!

(CRATCHIT warms his hands at a candle. FRED enters.)

FRED

A merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

Christmas a humbug, Uncle! You don't mean that, I am sure?

SCROOGE

I do. Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough.

FRED

Come, then. What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

Don't be cross, Uncle!

SCROOGE

What else can I be, when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! What's Christmastime to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer? If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!

FRED

Uncle!

SCROOGE

Nephew! Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

FRED

Keep it! But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE

Let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!

FRED

There are many things from which I might have derived good by which I have not profited, I dare say. Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmastime as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, Uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!

(CRATCHIT spontaneously applauds, then corrects himself.)

SCROOGE

(To Cratchit)

Let me hear another sound from you, and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation!

(To Fred.)

You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.

FRED

Don't be angry, Uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE

I'll see you first in the fires of hell.

FRED

But why?

SCROOGE

Why did you get married?

FRED

Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE

Because you fell in love! Good afternoon!

FRED

Nay, Uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

FRED

I want nothing from you. I ask nothing of you. Why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

FRED

I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So a merry Christmas, Uncle!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

FRED

And a happy New Year!

(FRED exits, stopping to speak with CRATCHIT.)

FRED (Cont'd)

Hello, Mr. Cratchit. How are Mrs. Cratchit and your children?

CRATCHIT

Very well, Sir. You're kind to inquire.

FRED

How does your lame son bear the winter?

CRATCHIT

He seems stronger, despite the cold. We hope for steady improvement, yes, we do!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

FRED

As do I.

CRATCHIT

And may the first Christmas with your wife bring great joy, Sir!

FRED

Thank'ee, truly. A very merry Christmas to the Cratchits, one and all!

SCROOGE

(To himself.)

There's another fellow, my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam.

(As FRED exits, the GENTLEMAN enters with a notebook,

removing his hat and bowing to SCROOGE.)

GENTLEMAN

Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE

Marley? Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years. He died seven years ago, this very night.

GENTLEMAN

I have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.

(Pulling out a pencil and opening his notebook.)

At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE

Are there no prisons?

GENTLEMAN

Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE

And the Union workhouses. Are they still in operation?

GENTLEMAN

They are. Still, I wish I could say they were not.

(LAMPLIGHTER enters the street outside, placing a brazier for warmth as he uses tools to repair dents in the streetlamp.)

SCROOGE

The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigor, then?

GENTLEMAN

Both very busy, sir.

SCROOGE

Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course. I'm very glad to hear it.

GENTLEMAN

Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and

GENTLEMAN (Cont'd)

drink, and means of warmth.

*(BEGGAR enters and warms himself by the brazier, as
LAMPLIGHTER works.)*

GENTLEMAN (Cont'd)

We choose this time because it is a time, of all other, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE

Nothing!

GENTLEMAN

You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE

I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, sir, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned – they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there.

GENTLEMAN

Many can't go there, and many would rather die.

SCROOGE

If they would rather die, they had better do it and decrease the surplus population. It's not my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon!

*(GENTLEMAN exits. **Special: Fog in growing darkness.** HENRY
and TINY TIM enter, going to Scrooge's keyhole for a prank.)*

HENRY and TINY TIM

(Singing loudly.)

GOD REST YE, MERRY GENTLEMEN,
LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY,
REMEMBER CHRIST OUR SAVIOR –

(SCROOGE raps the keyhole with a ruler.)

SCROOGE

Bah, Humbug!

(HENRY and TINY TIM run, laughing, to play around the

BEGGAR by the brazier. *Sound: Church clock strikes five.*
SCROOGE clears his desk and puts on his coat and hat, as he addresses CRATCHIT.)

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

I'll stand no more holiday racket and interruptions. You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

CRATCHIT

If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE

It's not convenient and not fair. If I was to stop half a crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used. And yet, you don't think me ill-used when I pay a day's wages for no work.

CRATCHIT

Only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE

A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning.

CRATCHIT

Indeed, I will, sir.

(SCROOGE exits growling. CRATCHIT snuffs his candle, puts on his coat, exits, locking the shop. CRATCHIT joins HENRY and TINY TIM, LAMPLIGHTER and BEGGAR, singing a refrain of "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen," in fun.)

LAMPLIGHTER, BEGGAR, CRATCHIT, HENRY, and TINY TIM
(Singing.)

O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY,
COMFORT AND JOY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY.

(LAMPLIGHTER exits with tools, followed by BEGGAR. CRATCHIT, HENRY and TINY TIM slide on the icy street, then exit to Poulterer's to buy a goose. Special: thick fog.)

Scene 3

*(SCROOGE enters, going to his front door. As he pulls out the key, Special: an image of Marley's face appears on the door.**

**Effect can be through projection or by actor's face behind a lit window in the door.*

SCROOGE stares, and the door looks normal again. SCROOGE opens the lock, enters and lights a candle. He looks behind the door before shutting it.)

SCROOGE

Humbug!

(Sound: The word echoes in the house. SCROOGE locks the door and goes upstairs to his room. He looks under the table and the bed and behind bed curtains, then sets down the candle and removes his hat and coat.)

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

Humbug!

(SCROOGE removes his jacket, cravat, and shoes, and puts on his dressing gown and slippers, as CRATCHIT enters with HENRY and TINY TIM at the Poulterer's window.)

CRATCHIT

Ay, boys, which goose shall we choose?

(CRATCHIT and the BOYS point variously.)

CRATCHIT (Cont'd)

There, you say? Indeed, that's a good one, for certain.

(CRATCHIT summons the POULTERER with a wave, pointing to the bird selected.)

CRATCHIT (Cont'd)

What a feast we'll have!

(POULTERER enters giving the wrapped goose to CRATCHIT.)

CRATCHIT (Cont'd)

(Handing goose to Henry.)

She's quite a plump bird, son. Take a firm hold there.

(Lifting Tiny Tim to his shoulder.)

Now home with haste, boys! Let the holiday begin!

(CRATCHIT, HENRY and TINY TIM exit as to home. SCROOGE puts on his night cap and picks up a bowl of gruel left on a bedside table by his housekeeper. Special: an old bell once used to communicate with an upper floor moves. Sound: bell rings softly, then loudly. He studies bell, and it stops ringing.)

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

Bah, humbug!

*(SCROOGE takes a bite of his gruel. **Sound: all bells in the house chime loudly.** He runs about seeking the source of noise. **Bells stop. Sound: a clanking noise down below begins, like someone dragging a heavy chain.**)*

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

What haunting noise!

*(SCROOGE gulps a couple of spoons of gruel. **Sound: chains clank louder, as if coming up stairs to his door.**)*

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

It's humbug still! I won't believe it!

*(**Special: MARLEY appears in his bedroom**, wearing a chain, made of cashboxes, keys, padlocks, and heavy purses and wound about him. There's a bandage around his head and lower jaw.)*

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

(Thrusting bowl onto the table.)

How now! What do you want with me?

(MARLEY removes the bandage, and his lower jaw drops.)

MARLEY

(In a forced, slow voice, as if unused.)

Much!

SCROOGE

Who are you?

MARLEY

(Labored, as experimenting with speech.)

Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE

Who were you, then? You're particular, for a shade.

MARLEY

(Voice a bit looser.)

In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE
Can you – can you sit down?

MARLEY
I can.

SCROOGE
Do it, then.

MARLEY
(Sitting, then conversational, yet still strange.)
You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE
I don't.

MARLEY
What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your own senses?

SCROOGE
I don't know.

MARLEY
Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE
Because a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheat. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of undone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!

(MARLEY cries frightfully, shaking his chain. SCROOGE falls on his knees.)

SCROOGE (Cont'd)
Mercy! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

MARLEY
Man of the worldly mind! Do you believe in me or not?

SCROOGE
I do. I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?

MARLEY
It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his

MARLEY (Cont'd)

fellow men, travelling far and wide. If that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. Doomed to wander the world – oh, woe is me! – and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!

(MARLEY cries again and shakes his chain.)

SCROOGE

You are fettered. Tell me why?

MARLEY

I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you? Or would you know the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this seven Christmas Eves ago. You have labored on it since. It is a ponderous chain!

SCROOGE

(Looking for his unseen chain.)

Jacob! Old Jacob Marley, tell me more! Speak comfort to me, Jacob!

MARLEY

I have none to give. It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. I cannot rest, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting house – Mark me! – in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money changing hole, and weary journeys lie before me!

SCROOGE

You must have been very slow about it, Jacob.

MARLEY

Slow!

SCROOGE

Seven years dead, and traveling all the time?

MARLEY

No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse.

(MARLEY cries and rattles chains again.)

MARLEY (Cont'd)

Oh! Captive, not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness! Not to know that no amount of regret can make amends for one life's opportunities misused!

MARLEY (Cont'd)

Yet such was I!

SCROOGE

But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.

MARLEY

Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business, charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!

(Dropping his chain loudly.)

At this time of the rolling year I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow beings with my eyes turned down and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me?

(Sound: Church clock chimes ring tune for a quarter past the hour: ding dong, ding dong.)

MARLEY (Cont'd)

Hear me! My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE

I will, but don't be hard upon me! Don't be flowery, Jacob! Pray!

MARLEY

How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day. That is no light part of my penance. I am here to warn you that you have yet a hope of escaping my fate. A chance of my procuring, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE

You were always a good friend to me. Thankee!

MARLEY

You will be haunted by Three Spirits.

SCROOGE

I – I think I'd rather not.

MARLEY

Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first on the morrow, when the bell tolls one.

SCROOGE

Couldn't I take 'em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?

MARLEY

Expect the second when the bell tolls two. The third, upon the last the stroke of three. Look to see me no more, and look that, for your own sake, you remember what was passed between us!

*(MARLEY binds the bandage around his head again and holds his chain. He walks away, pointing to the window. **Sounds: incoherent cries and wailings and MARLEY joins the “dirge.”** SCROOGE peers out to see frightful spirits flying by. **Special: MARLEY disappears.**)*

SCROOGE

Phantoms! Familiar horrors! Struggling to hurry in those wretched chains! The mist enshrouds them. Look no more!

(SCROOGE leaves the window. Searches the room for MARLEY, then goes to secure the bedroom door.)

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

(Stumbling into bed.)

Humbug! Hum—

(SCROOGE falls asleep. Lights go dark.)

*(Sounds: winds. Church clock chimes striking the 4 quarters: ding dong, ding dong – dong ding dong ding - ding dong, ding dong – dong ding ding dong. SCROOGE awakens, listening for the hour. **Sound: Church clock strikes 1.**)*

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

The hour itself, and nothing else! I shall lie awake until the hour passes, since I can no more go to sleep than go to Heaven.

(Special: Puff of smoke and flashing light. SPIRIT 1 appears: a mature but childlike figure, radiating light.)

SCROOGE

Are you the Spirit, whose coming was foretold to me?

SPIRIT 1

I am!

SCROOGE

Who, and what are you?

SPIRIT 1

I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE

Long past?

SPIRIT 1

No. Your past.

SCROOGE

What business brings you here?

SPIRIT 1

Your welfare!

SCROOGE

I'm much obliged.

(Aside.)

I cannot help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would be more conducive to that end.

SPIRIT 1

Your reclamation, then. Take heed, Ebenezer Scrooge! Rise, and walk with me!

(SPIRIT 1 walks SCROOGE toward the window.)

SCROOGE

I am a mortal and liable to stumble.

SPIRIT 1

Bear but a touch of my hand there,

(Laying a hand on Scrooge's heart.)

And you shall be upheld in more than this!

Scene 4

(Special: SPIRIT 1 and SCROOGE pass outside to stand upon an open country road, between snowy fields, on a clear cold day.)

SCROOGE

Good Heaven! I was bred in this place.

(Sniffing the odors.)

I was a boy here!

SPIRIT 1

Your lip is trembling, and what is that upon your cheek?

SCROOGE

A pimple. Lead me where you will.

SPIRIT 1

You recollect the way?

SCROOGE

Remember it! I could walk it blindfold.

SPIRIT 1

Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!

(SCROOGE and SPIRIT 1 see two boys, Off, running and calling to each other in the fields and laughing.)

ALBERT, *Voice Off*

Halloa, Phillip!

PHILLIP, *Voice Off*

I mustn't tarry, Al!

SCROOGE

It's Albert! And Phillip!

SPIRIT 1

These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us.

ALBERT, *Voice Off*

Let's find Sammy!

PHILLIP, *Voice Off*

And miss the Yule Log? Never! Merry Christmas!

ALBERT, *Voice Off*

Merry Christmas!

(SCROOGE sees boys, as if leaving on different paths, exiting.)

SPIRIT 1

And what was "Merry Christmas!" to Scrooge? What good did it do him?

(SCROOGE and SPIRIT 1 see a bare room where BOY SCROOGE sits at a desk reading. SCROOGE cries seeing him.)

SPIRIT 1 (Cont'd)

The school is not quite deserted. Here's a solitary child, neglected by his friends.

SCROOGE

I know. Left alone with his books.

(SPIRIT 1 touches SCROOGE'S arm. SCROOGE and BOY SCROOGE are amazed, as if seeing the parrot and Robinson Crusoe appearing outside.)

SCROOGE (Cont'd)

Why, look!

BOY SCROOGE

The green Parrot!

SCROOGE

That yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head, there he is! "Poor Robin Crusoe," the parrot called him, when he came home, after sailing round the island. Yes, yes, I know! One Christmastime, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he did come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy!

BOY SCROOGE

(Pointing, Off, as if seeing Friday pass.)

There goes Friday!

SCROOGE

(Excited.)

Running for his life to the creek! Halloa! Hoop! Halloa!

(Weeping with pity.)

Poor boy! I wish – but it's too late now.

SPIRIT 1

What is the matter?

SCROOGE

Nothing, nothing. There were boys singing a Christmas carol at my door last night. I should like to have given them something, that's all.

SPIRIT 1

(Smiling.)

Let us see another Christmas! The other school boys: gone home for jolly holidays.

(The room darkens. BOY SCROOGE exits. A sad YOUTH SCROOGE paces, alone after other boys have gone home. FAN, his younger sister, enters.)