

ACT ONE

SCENE: STREET BEFORE SCROOGE AND MARLEY'S COUNTING HOUSE

Christmas eve, 1843. Early evening.  
The street outside Scrooge and Marley's  
Counting house is full of vendors and  
shoppers; people bustling to and fro.  
There is a happy, warm feeling.

TOWNSPEOPLE

(Singing)

GOD REST YE MERRY, GENTLEMEN,  
LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY  
REMEMBER CHRIST OUR SAVIOR  
WAS BON 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,  
DOTH BRING REDEEMING GRACE.  
O! TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY, COMFORT AND JOY.  
O! TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY.

A young man, THOMAS enters. He meets  
MRS. DILBER and MRS. GRAYMALKIN.

MRS. DILBER

Merry Christmas to ye, Thomas.

THOMAS

Merry Christmas, Mrs. Dilber.

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Where are you heading in such a hurry, dearie?

THOMAS

Mrs. Graymalkin, I've an appointment with Old Scratch, er,  
begging your pardon, Mr. Scrooge.

PADDOCK approaches them.

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Don't apologize. He's been called worse. I'm his charwoman.  
I myself have done so.

They laugh.

MRS. DILBER

He's an odd bird, Scrooge is.

THOMAS

Never was a truer word spoken.

MRS. DILBER

Look at his sign. Scrooge and Marley. Scrooge and Marley, it says. Marley's been dead these seven years.

PADDOCK

Dead as a door-nail. Mind, I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined myself to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors--

MRS. DILBER

(Overriding Paddock)

Some have said that Scrooge don't even know that Marley, his own partner for I don't know how many years, is dead.

PADDOCK

Died seven years ago this very night. Signed the burial certificate myself.

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Of course Old Scratch knows he is dead. He just never painted out Marley's name. Oh, he's a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone.

MRS. DILBER

A squeezing--

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Wrenching--

MRS. DILBER

Grasping--

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Clutching--

PADDOCK

Covetous old sinner.

MRS. DILBER

Hard and sharp as flint, he is.

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Solitary as an oyster. Secret and self-contained. There's a frost on his heart as well as on his head.

PADDOCK

Always carries his own low temperature with him, he does.

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Even the blind men's dogs appear to know him; and when they see him coming on, tug their owners into doorways.

MRS. DILBER

Many's the man that's seen that grisly silhouette of his reaching out his hand--

PADDOCK

--like the Grim Reaper--

MRS. DILBER

--to collect on debts from them that haven't got it.

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Squeezing it out of them--

PADDOCK

--like their very life's breath.

MRS. DILBER

I, myself, have been the object of that icy, grim, bony hand. Many times it has provided me with the opportunity to talk to him.

THOMAS

About what?

MRS. DILBER

About how truly indebted I am to him.

They laugh.

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

This day will lose its chill before that stone called Ebenezer Scrooge's heart will warm.

MRS. DILBER

What does he care? He likes it that way, he does.

The clock strikes.

THOMAS

Well, dear friends, I must be off to my unavoidable encounter with our dear friend, Old Scratch or, I fear, that my dear Caroline, might be left a widow on this Christmas Eve. Best of the day to you.

MRS. DILBER

Merry Christmas, Thomas.

Godspeed.

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Thomas exits into the Counting House.

Near dark now.

MRS. DILBER

When shall we meet here again?

MRS. GRAYMALKIN

Mrs. Graymalkin takes out a flask and takes a big swig.

On a better day than this.

MRS. DILBER

Mrs. Graymalkin offers it to Mrs. Dilber who refuses it.

When Old Scratch has gone from us.

PADDOCK

Look at that fog rolling in.

MRS. DILBER

Mrs. Graymalkin takes another big swig. They part ways. Two small ragamuffin children, a boy, IGNORANCE, and a girl, WANT, dressed in rags and looking somewhat foreboding scurry through the scene. As the townspeople sing the scene changes.

TOWNSPEOPLE

LET ALL MORTAL FLESH KEEP SILENCE,  
AND WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING STAND;  
PONDER NOTHING EARTHLY MINDED,  
FOR WITH BLESSING IN HIS HAND,  
CHRIST OUR GOD TO EARTH DESCENDETH,  
OUR FULL HOMAGE TO DEMAND.

Some try to avoid making eye contact with Ignorance and Want. Others cross to avoid making the path of these two. Ignorance and Want disappear as quickly as they came.

SCENE: INSIDE SCROOGE'S COUNTING HOUSE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING.

EBENEZER SCROOGE, 65, is seated as his desk writing.

The entire office is as dark and frosty as Scrooge. BOB CRATCHIT, late 40's, Scrooge's assistant, sits at a smaller desk nearby. There is a very small fire. Thomas stands before Scrooge with his hat in his hand and his head bowed.

THOMAS

Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Scrooge, Sir.

Scrooge looks at Thomas frostily over his glasses and grunts. Thomas exits. Cratchit blows into his hands and rubs them together vigorously. He eyes the coal scuttle sitting next to the pitiful fire. Slowly, he creeps over to the scuttle. As he is about to reach in and grab a piece of coal, Scrooge slowly turns and scowls at Cratchit. Cratchit freezes caught in Scrooge's glare. Slowly Cratchit backs up and returns to his desk. FRED, late 20s, Scrooge's nephew, enters cheerily.

FRED

Merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

Christmas a humbug, Uncle? Surely you don't mean that.

SCROOGE

I do.

FRED

Uncle!

SCROOGE

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

FRED

Come then, what right have you to be dismal? What reason 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! Out upon Merry Christmas! What's Christmas Time 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.

FRED

Uncle!

SCROOGE

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

FRED

But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE

Then let me leave it alone. Much good may it do you. Much good has it 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 them. I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, 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 up their shut-up hearts freely and to think of people as if they really were fellow travellers to the grave. Not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. 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 applauds involuntarily.

SCROOGE

(To Cratchit)

Another sound from you and you'll keep Christmas by losing your situation.

(To Fred)

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

FRED

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

SCROOGE

I'll see you tomorrow. In Hell.

FRED

But why? Why?

SCROOGE

Why did you get married?

FRED

Because I fell in love.

Scrooge drops some coins in the scales and the scales tip to one side.

SCROOGE

Because you fell in love! Bah! Good afternoon!

FRED

Uncle, 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.

Fred turns slowly to go. He stops at the door.

FRED (cont'd)

We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the visit in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So a Merry Christmas, Uncle!

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

(As he is exiting)

And a Happy New Year!

Fred and Cratchit whisper "Merry Christmas" to each other. Fred exits.

SCROOGE

You're a fine one. Fifteen shillings a week; a wife and a family, talking about Merry Christmas.

TWO CHARITY MEN enter. One is portly and jolly. The other is tall and thin.

CHARITY MAN 1

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

SCROOGE

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

CHARITY MAN 1

(Hands credentials to Scrooge)

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

Scrooge frowns and returns the papers to him.

CHARITY MAN 2

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 at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE

Are there no prisons?

CHARITY MAN 1

Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE

And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?

CHARITY MAN 1

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

SCROOGE

Brixton Prison? The Poor Law? Aren't they in full vigor, then?

CHARITY MAN 2

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.

CHARITY MAN 2

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 drink and means of warmth.

CHARITY MAN 1

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

SCROOGE

Nothing.

CHARITY MAN 1

You wish to remain anonymous?

SCROOGE

I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, 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.

CHARITY MAN 1

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.

CHARITY MAN 2

But, sir--

SCROOGE

It's none of 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, gentlemen.

The Charity Men look at each other bewildered and head for the door. Scrooge resumes his work. Cratchit reaches out and hands them a small coin. They nod in appreciation and exit.

A YOUNG BOY appears at the door.

YOUNG BOY

(Singing)

GOD BLESS YOU MERRY GENTLEMAN!  
MAY NOTHING YOU DISMAY....

Scrooge swiftly grabs a ruler and chase the Young Boy away.

The clock chimes nine. Cratchit snuffs out his candle; he puts on his muffler and coat and crosses to Scrooge.

SCROOGE

(Without looking up)

You'll be wanting all day tomorrow, I suppose.

CRATCHIT

If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE

(Counting Cratchit's pay)

It is not convenient. And it's not fair.

CRATCHIT

Yes, sir.

SCROOGE

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

CRATCHIT

Begging your pardon, it is only one day a year.

SCROOGE

A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!

(Gives Cratchit his pay)

Be here all the earlier next morning.

CRATCHIT

Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Bless you, sir. Merry Chris...

Scrooge scowls at him.

CRATCHIT (cont'd)

G'day, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

Cratchit exits. As Scrooge does his final tally, we hear a song from the street.

TOWNSPEOPLE

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL,  
AND RANSOM CAPTIVE ISRAEL,  
THAT MOURNS IN LONELY EXILE HERE

UNTIL THE SON OF GOD APPEAR.  
 REJOICE! REJOICE!  
 EMMANUEL SHALL COME TO THEE, O ISRAEL.

He closes his book, puts on his coat, snuffs out his candle; goes to the door; pauses. Turns back to the office and looks at it for a moment. A lost look crosses his face. He then exits to the street. As the music continues, the scene changes.

SCENE: OUTSIDE SCROOGE'S COUNTING HOUSE

Vendors are selling their wares. A dense fog is moving in.

TOWNSPEOPLE

O COME, THOU ROD OF JESSE, COME  
 FREE THINE OWN FROM SATAN'S TYRANNY;  
 FROM DEPTHS OF HELL THY PEOPLE SAVE,  
 AND GIVE THEM VICTORY OVER THE GRAVE.  
 REJOICE! REJOICE!  
 EMMANUEL SHALL COME TO THEE, O ISRAEL.

Scrooge crosses to a SOUP VENDOR and purchases a tin of soup. The Soup Vendor doffs his hat and wishes Scrooge a "Merry Christmas." Scrooge replies with a "Bah!" And moves on. He crosses to Paddock who hands him a small sack of money. Scrooge counts it. Scrooge puts out his hand for the rest. Paddock grudgingly hands him one last coin. The scene continues to change.

TOWNSPEOPLE (cont'd)

O COME, THOU DAYSPRING, COME AND CHEER  
 OUR SPIRITS BY THINE ADVENT HERE;  
 DISPERSE THE GLOOMY CLOUDS OF NIGHT,  
 AND DEATH'S DARK SHADOWS PUT TO FLIGHT.  
 REJOICE! REJOICE!  
 EMMANUEL SHALL COME TO THEE, O ISRAEL.

Scrooge is at the door to his house. There is a large knocker on the door.

Scrooge takes a skeleton key from his pocket and starts to insert it in the lock. The knocker changes to the face of JACOB MARLEY. The people on the street freeze.