

SCROOGE. *Humbug!!*

The withered man – JACOB MARLEY – smiles, a horrible, basilisk smile.

MARLEY. As my esteemed partner would have it, Cratchit. Humbug!

BOB. Yes, Mr Marley. Humbug, sir. I'm sure, sir. Yes, sir.

Lights up on the adjacent office which abuts MARLEY's. It's almost a duplicate. At his high desk, his face buried in ledgers is EBENEZER SCROOGE.

SCROOGE. You'll deliver those letters by hand, Cratchit. Start ①

BOB. All of them, Mr Scrooge?

SCROOGE. Every. Single. One.

BOB. But it's almost seven, sir. And Christmas Eve...

SCROOGE looks up, quill poised. He's crabbed, gimlet-eyed, a mouth like a dog's arse.

SCROOGE (*contemptuously*). Christmas Eve. And you'll want the whole day off tomorrow?

BOB. If... quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE. It's not convenient. And it's not fair. If we were to stop you half a crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound!

BOB. It is only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December. Eh, Jacob?

MARLEY. Well put, Ebenezer. *Christmas!* Hum—

SCROOGE. —bug!

SCROOGE fixes BOB with an unwavering stare.

You'll despatch every last one of those letters, Cratchit. And only then may you get yourself home for your... celebrations.

BOB. Yes, sir.

In a flurry, BOB scrambles into his long scarf and claps his battered hat onto his head.

Goodnight, Mr Scrooge. Mr Marley. A merry –

SCROOGE and MARLEY look up simultaneously. The words die on BOB's lips and he hurries out.

There's a blast of freezing air and snowflakes from the door.

MARLEY. A merry Christmas!

SCROOGE. And him a clerk on fifteen shillings a week! We have only ourselves to blame, Jacob. Out of misguided altruism we employ wretches such as Cratchit – yet do they attempt to rise above their miserable station? Do they grasp their opportunities as we did? Nay! What that lazy fellow needs is his wits sharpening. What do you say? A reduction in salary? *Thirteen* shillings a week?

MARLEY. Twelve?

SCROOGE. Eleven?

MARLEY. Ten?

SCROOGE. Ten! A nice round figure, eh, Jacob?

They both chuckle mirthlessly. Then MARLEY gives a little gasp of pain. He clutches his arm, then his chest. His quill flutters to the floor. In the other office, SCROOGE is oblivious.

Do you want to break the happy news, Jacob, or shall I?

Jacob?

No response.

Jacob?

No response.

He gets up and shuffles into MARLEY's office.

MARLEY lies stretched across his desk.

... CAROL

Scene Seven

SCROOGE looks about. They're in a churchyard. Walled in by houses, overrun by grass and weeds, choked up with too much burying.

Trembling, SCROOGE advances into the dreadful place. He can hardly bear to look at the GHOST which has stopped before one particular grave and is pointing downwards.

SCROOGE. Before... before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point, answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are they shadows of things that *may* be, only?

Still, the GHOST points down.

Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!

The GHOST does not stir.

SCROOGE creeps forward to look at the name on the tomb.

It is, of course, his own name: EBENEZER SCROOGE!

SCROOGE. I am that wretched man upon the bed! No, Spirit! Oh no, no, no!

The GHOST's finger does not move. SCROOGE hurls himself at its feet.

(Desperate.) Good Spirit! Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!

He clutches at the GHOST's hand and it tries to pull away.

SCROOGE persists and grabs desperately at the folds of the GHOST's robes.

The robes fall away revealing beneath – JACOB MARLEY!

SCROOGE gasps.

MARLE
me?
SCROO
For
begi
one
like
SC
hin
(Se
ke
Fu
no
st
E

MARLEY. I tried to warn you, Ebenezer! Why did you not heed me? Why?

SCROOGE. But I will! I shall! Say it's not too late!

For answer MARLEY merely looks up – as a HUGE chain begins to descend from above! It's three times the size of the one MARLEY bears himself. And it settles on SCROOGE like the suffocating tentacles of a monstrous creature.

SCROOGE *scrabbles desperately at the chain as it swamps him.*

(Sobbing.) I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!

Blackout.

ACT FIVE

Scene One

SCROOGE opens his eyes to find he is wrapped up in his own bed-curtains.

He falls out of bed and looks around, gasping. Pale morning light – bright with snow – is filtering through the dirty panes of his window.

SCROOGE claps his hands together as in prayer.

SCROOGE. I'm alive! Oh God. I'm alive! Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees.

He shoots a look at the bed-curtains.

They are not torn down! They are not torn down, rings and all. They are here – *I am here* – the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be! I know they will!

He leaps up and staggers to the dresser where a chipped jug and bowl sit.

I don't know what to do! Haha! A good wash!

He lifts up the bowl and the water is frozen. He smiles, lifts out the ice and dashes it to the floor.

Haha! No time for bathing! Unless it's an ice bath! Clothes, clothes...

He drags his clothes from a table.

Oh awful! Horrid!

He throws them away.

Wonderfully awful! Wonderfully horrid! I don't know what to do!

I'm as light
merry as
Christma

He dash

There's
by whic
corner
windo'

all tru

And h

I don

long

quit

He

beg

Of

H

ci

S

I

BC

S

E

I'm as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I'm as merry as a schoolboy! I'm as giddy as a drunken man! A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world!

He dashes into the parlour.

There's the saucepan that the gruel was in! There's the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered. There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present sat. There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits. It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha ha ha!

And he starts to laugh hysterically till his face is wet with tears.

I don't know what day of the month it is. I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby.

He laughs again, then stops in wonder as the church bells begin to peal madly.

Oh, what a blessed din!

He races to the window and throws it open. It's a bright, clear, freezing morning.

SCROOGE *breathes in the air as if it was wine.* A BOY *in his Sunday best is trudging through the snow outside.*

(Calling.) What's today?

BOY. Eh?

SCROOGE. What's today, my fine fellow?

BOY. Today? Why, Christmas Day!

SCROOGE. It's Christmas Day! I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can.