

ACT I

Scene 1 Mood Marley is narrator

[Ghostly music in auditorium. A single spotlight on JACOB MARLEY, D.C. He is ancient; awful, dead-eyed. He speaks straight out to auditorium.] Marley is dead and a ghost

Downstage Center

MARLEY. [Cackle-voiced] My name is Jacob Marley and I am dead. [He laughs.] Oh, no, there's no doubt that I am dead. The register of my burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker . . . and by my chief mourner . . . Ebenezer Scrooge . . . [Pause; remembers] I am dead as a door-nail. simile

[A spotlight fades up, Stage Right, on SCROOGE, in his counting-house,¹ counting. Lettering on the window behind SCROOGE reads: "SCROOGE AND MARLEY, LTD." The spotlight is tight on SCROOGE's head and shoulders. We shall not yet see into the offices and setting. Ghostly music continues, under. MARLEY looks across at SCROOGE: pitifully. After a moment's pause]

I present him to you: Ebenezer Scrooge . . . England's most tightfisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrench-

office; accountant

office

tight-fisted = cheap

Characterization

ing, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him freezes his old features, nips his pointed nose, shrivels his cheek, stiffens his gait; makes his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and speaks out shrewdly in his grating voice. Look at him. Look at him . . .

simile

[SCROOGE counts and mumbles.]

SCROOGE. They owe me money and I will collect. I will have them jailed, if I have to. They owe me money and I will collect what is due me.

[MARLEY moves towards SCROOGE: two steps. The spotlight stays with him.]

Mood

MARLEY. [Disgusted] He and I were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was my sole executor, my sole administrator, my sole assign, my sole residuary legatee,² my sole friend and my sole mourner. But Scrooge was not so cut up by the sad event of my death, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of my funeral, and solemnized³ it with an undoubted with ceremony; made official

bargain. [Pauses again in disgust] He never painted out my name from the window. There it stands, on the window and above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to our business call him Scrooge and sometimes they call him Marley. He answers to both names. It's all the same to him. And it's cheaper than painting in a new sign, isn't it? [Pauses: moves closer to SCROOGE] Nobody has ever stopped him in the street to say, with glad-some looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children ever ask him what it is o'clock, no man or woman now, or ever in his life, not once, inquire the way to such and such a place. [MARLEY stands next to SCROOGE now. They share, so it seems, a spotlight.] But what

does Scrooge care of any of this? It is the very thing he likes! To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance.

[A ghostly bell rings in the distance. MARLEY moves away from SCROOGE, now, heading D. again. As he does, he "takes" the light: SCROOGE has disappeared into the black void beyond. MARLEY walks D.C., talking directly to the audience. Pauses]

The bell tolls and I must take my leave. You must stay a while with Scrooge and watch him play out his scroogey life. It is now the story: the once-upon-a-time. Scrooge is busy in his counting-house. Where else? Christmas eve and Scrooge is busy in his counting-house. It is cold, bleak, biting weather outside: foggy withal: and, if you listen closely,

you can hear the people in the court go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them . . .

[The clocks outside strike three.]

Only three! and quite dark outside already: it has not been light all day this day.

[This ghostly bell rings in the distance again. MARLEY looks about him. Music in. MARLEY flies away.] (N.B. Marley's comings and goings should, from time to time, induce the explosion of the odd flash-pot. I.H.)

IH - playwright's initials

Scene 2

[Christmas music in, sung by a live chorus, full. At conclusion of song, sound fades under and into the distance. Lights up in set: offices of Scrooge and Marley, Ltd. SCROOGE sits at his desk, at work. Near him is a tiny fire. His door is open and in his line of vision, we see SCROOGE'S clerk, BOB CRATCHIT, who sits in a dismal tank of a cubicle, copying letters. Near CRATCHIT is a fire so tiny as to barely cast a light: perhaps it is one pitifully glowing coal? CRATCHIT rubs his hands together, puts on a white comforter⁴ and tries to heat his hands around his candle. SCROOGE'S NEPHEW enters, unseen.]

SCROOGE. What are you doing, Cratchit? Acting cold, are you? Next, you'll be asking to replenish your coal from my coal-box, won't you? Well, save your breath, Cratchit! Unless you're prepared to find employ elsewhere!

NEPHEW. *[Cheerfully; surprising SCROOGE]* A merry Christmas to you, Uncle! God save you! **Characterize Fred**

SCROOGE. Bah! Humbug!⁵

4. comforter (kum' fər tər) *n.*: A long, woolen scarf.
5. Humbug (hum' bug') *interj.*: Nonsense! (can also be used as a noun to mean nonsense or something done to cheat or deceive).

NEPHEW. Christmas a "humbug," Uncle? I'm sure you don't mean that.

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

Notice how Scrooge equates happiness to money

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

SCROOGE. Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW. Don't be cross, Uncle.

SCROOGE. What else can I be? Eh? When I live in a world of fools such as this? Merry Christmas? What's Christmastime to you but a time of paying bills without any money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but 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!

Notice his distaste for Christmas

NEPHEW. Uncle!

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

NEPHEW. Keep it! But you don't keep it, Uncle.

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

NEPHEW. There are many things from which I have derived good, by which I have not profited, I daresay. Christmas among the rest. But I am sure that I always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—as a good time: the only time I know of, when men and women seem 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

Fred doesn't need money the way that Scrooge does. He appreciates the season of goodwill

scrap of gold or silver in my pocket. I believe that it *has* done me good, and that it *will* do me good: and I say, God bless it!

[The CLERK *in the tank applauds*, looks at the furious SCROOGE and pokes out his tiny fire, as if in exchange for the moment of impropriety. SCROOGE yells at him.]

SCROOGE. [To the CLERK] Let me hear another sound from you and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. [To the NEPHEW] You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.⁶

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

SCROOGE. I'd rather see myself dead than see myself with your family!

NEPHEW. But, why? Why?

SCROOGE. Why did you get married?

NEPHEW. Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE. That, sir, is the only thing that you have said to me in your entire lifetime which is even more ridiculous than "Merry Christmas"! [Turns from NEPHEW] Good afternoon.

NEPHEW. Nay, Uncle, you never came to see me before I married either. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?

SCROOGE. Good afternoon, Nephew!

NEPHEW. I want nothing from you: I ask nothing of you: why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE. Good afternoon!

NEPHEW. I am sorry with all my heart, to find you so resolute. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my

6. Parliament (pär' lə mənt): The national legislative body of Great Britain, in some ways like the American Congress.

Christmas humor to the last. So A Merry Christmas, Uncle!

SCROOGE. Good afternoon!

NEPHEW. And A Happy New Year!

SCROOGE. Good afternoon!

NEPHEW. [He stands facing SCROOGE.] Uncle, you are the most . . . [Pauses] No, I shan't. My Christmas humor is intact . . . [Pause] God bless you, Uncle . . . [NEPHEW turns and starts for the door; he stops at CRATCHIT'S cage.] Merry Christmas, Bob Cratchit . . .

CRATCHIT. Merry Christmas to you sir, and a very, very happy New Year . . . end of audio

SCROOGE. [Calling across to them] Oh, fine, a perfection, just fine . . . to see the perfect pair of you: husbands, with wives and children to support . . . my clerk there earning fifteen shillings a week . . . and the perfect pair of you, talking about a Merry Christmas! [Pauses] I'll retire to Bedlam!⁷

NEPHEW. [To CRATCHIT] He's impossible!

CRATCHIT. Oh, mind him not, sir. He's getting on in years, and he's alone. He's noticed your visit. I'll wager your visit has warmed him.

NEPHEW. Him? Uncle Ebenezer Scrooge? Warmed? You are a better Christian than I am, sir.

CRATCHIT. [Opening the door for NEPHEW; two DO-GOODERS will enter, as NEPHEW exits] Good day to you, sir, and God bless.

NEPHEW. God bless . . . [One man who enters is portly, the other is thin. Both are pleasant.]

CRATCHIT. Can I help you, gentlemen?

7. Bedlam (bed' ləm): A hospital in London for the mentally ill.

Threats to Bob

Notice Scrooge's distaste for marriage

Distaste for love???

Notice how optimistic Bob is

resolute - stubborn

honor

THIN MAN. [Carrying papers and books; looks around CRATCHIT to SCROOGE] 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.

PORTLY MAN. We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner . . . [Offers his calling card]

SCROOGE. [Handing back the card: unlooked at] . . . Good afternoon.

THIN MAN. This will take but a moment, sir . . .

PORTLY MAN. 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?

PORTLY MAN. Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE. And aren't the Union workhouses still in operation?

THIN MAN. They are. Still. I wish that I could say that they are not.

SCROOGE. The Treadmill⁸ and the Poor Law⁹ are in full vigor, then?

THIN MAN. Both very busy, sir.

8. the Treadmill (tred' mil'): A kind of mill wheel turned by the weight of persons treading steps arranged around it; this device was used to punish prisoners in jails.

9. the Poor Law: A series of laws were passed in England from the 17th century on to help the poor; changes to the law in 1834 gave responsibility for this relief to the national government but did not provide much aid for the poor.

SCROOGE. Ohhh, I see. I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them from their useful course. [Pauses] I'm glad to hear it.

PORTLY MAN. 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. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. [Pen in hand; as well as notepad] What shall I put you down for, sir?

SCROOGE. Nothing!

PORTLY MAN. You wish to be left anonymous?

SCROOGE. I wish to be left alone! [Pauses; turns away; turns back to them] Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I help to support the establishments that I have mentioned;—they cost enough; and those who are badly off—must go there.

THIN MAN. 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. Besides—excuse me—I don't know that.

THIN MAN. But you might know it!

SCROOGE. 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, gentlemen! [Scrooge turns his back on the gentlemen and returns to his desk.]

PORTLY MAN. But, sir, Mr. Scrooge . . . think of the poor.

Want and Abundance are personified

to have plenty

Theme

Reminder of his importance on his job

Scrooge was of the belief that the govt. would take care of the poor--he shouldn't have to do so.

SCROOGE. [Turns suddenly to them. Pauses] Take your leave of my offices, sirs, while I am still smiling.

Parallel structure [The THIN MAN looks at the PORTLY MAN. They are undone. They shrug. They move to door. Cratchit hops up to open it for them.]

THIN MAN. Good day, sir . . . [To CRATCHIT] A merry Christmas to you, sir . . .

CRATCHIT. Yes. A Merry Christmas to both of you . . .

PORTLY MAN. Merry Christmas . . .

[CRATCHIT silently squeezes something into the hand of the THIN MAN.]

THIN MAN. What's this?

CRATCHIT. Shhhh . . .

[CRATCHIT opens the door; wind and snow whistle into the room.]

THIN MAN. Thank you, sir, thank you.

[CRATCHIT closes the door and returns to his workplace. SCROOGE is at his own counting table. He talks to CRATCHIT without looking up.]

SCROOGE. It's less of a time of year for being merry, and more a time of year for being loony . . . if you ask me.

CRATCHIT. Well, I don't know, sir . . .

[The clock's bell strikes six o'clock.]

Well, there it is, eh, six?

SCROOGE. Saved by six bells, are you?

CRATCHIT. I must be going home . . . [He snuffs out his candle and puts on his hat.] I hope you have a . . . very very lovely day tomorrow, sir . . .

SCROOGE. Hmmm. Oh, you'll be wanting the whole day tomorrow, I suppose?

CRATCHIT. If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE. It's not convenient, and it's not fair. If I was to stop **half-a-crown** for it, you'd think yourself ill-used. I'll be bound?

[CRATCHIT smiles faintly.]

small coin

CRATCHIT. I don't know, sir . . .

SCROOGE. And yet, you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work . . .

CRATCHIT. It's only but once a year . . .

SCROOGE. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every 25th of December! But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier the next morning!

CRATCHIT. Oh, I will, sir. I will. I promise you. And, sir . . .

SCROOGE. Don't say it, Cratchit.

CRATCHIT. But let me wish you a . . .

SCROOGE. Don't say it, Cratchit. I warn you . . .

CRATCHIT. Sir!

SCROOGE. Cratchit!

[CRATCHIT opens the door.]

CRATCHIT. All right, then, sir . . . well . . . [Suddenly] Merry Christmas, Mr. Scrooge!

[And he runs out the door, shutting same behind him. SCROOGE moves to his desk; gathering his coat, hat, etc. A BOY appears at his window. . . .]

BOY. [Singing] "Away in a manger . . ."

[SCROOGE seizes his ruler and whacks at the image of the BOY outside. The BOY leaves.]

SCROOGE. Bah! Humbug! Christmas! Bah! Humbug! [He shuts out the light.]

A note on the crossover, following Scene 2:

[SCROOGE will walk alone to his rooms from his offices. As he makes a long slow cross of the stage, the scenery should change. Christmas music will be heard, various people will cross by SCROOGE, often smiling happily.]

There will be occasional pleasant greetings tossed at him.

SCROOGE, in contrast to all, will grump and mumble. He will snap at passing boys, as might a horrid old hound.

In short, SCROOGE's sounds and movements will define him in contrast from all other people who cross the stage: he is the misanthrope, the malcontent, the miser. He is SCROOGE.

This statement of SCROOGE's character, by contrast to all other characters, should seem comical to the audience.

During SCROOGE's crossover to his rooms, snow should begin to fall. All passers-by will hold their faces to the sky, smiling, allowing snow to shower them lightly. SCROOGE, by contrast, will bat at the flakes with his walking-stick, as might an insomniac swat at a sleep-stopping, middle-of-the-night swarm of mosquitoes. He will comment on the blackness of the night, and, finally, reach his rooms and his encounter with the magical specter: MARLEY, his eternal mate.]

20:38 audio

Scene 3

SCROOGE. No light at all . . . no moon . . . that is what is at the center of a Christmas Eve: dead black: void . . .

[SCROOGE puts his key in the door's keyhole. He has reached his rooms now. The door knocker changes and is now MARLEY's face. A musical sound: quickly: ghostly. MARLEY's image is not at all angry, but looks at SCROOGE as did the old MARLEY look at SCROOGE. The hair is curiously stirred; eyes

wide open, dead: absent of focus. SCROOGE stares wordlessly here. The face, before his very eyes, does **deliquesce**.¹⁰ It is a knocker again. SCROOGE opens the door and checks the back of same, probably for MARLEY's pigtail. Seeing nothing but screws and nuts, SCROOGE refuses the memory.]

Pooh, pooh!

[The sound of the door closing resounds throughout the house as thunder. Every room echoes the sound. SCROOGE fastens the door and walks across the hall to the stairs, trimming his candle as he goes; and then he goes slowly up the staircase. He checks each room: sitting room, bedroom, lumber-room. He looks under the sofa, under the table: nobody there. He fixes his evening **gruel on the hob**,¹¹ changes his jacket. SCROOGE sits near the tiny low-flamed fire, sipping his gruel. There are various pictures on the walls: all of them now show likenesses of MARLEY. SCROOGE blinks his eyes.]

Bah! Humbug!

[SCROOGE walks in a circle about the room. The pictures change back into their natural images. He sits down at the table in front of the fire. A bell hangs overhead. It begins to ring, of its own accord. Slowly, surely, begins the ringing of every bell in the house. They continue ringing for nearly half a minute. SCROOGE is stunned by the phenomenon. The bells cease their ringing all at once. Deep below SCROOGE, in the basement of the house, there is the sound of clanking, of some enormous chain being dragged across the floors; and now up the stairs. We hear doors flying open.]

10. deliquesce (del' ə kwes') v.: Melt away.

11. gruel (grūō' əl) **on the hob** (hăb): A thin broth warming on a ledge at the back or side of the fireplace.

Grumpy character

contrast with those around him

Bells ring as a warning