

SETTING: *An old warehouse on the outskirts of London, filled with odds and ends of Dickensian life. This is a place where ghosts live, and on this particular Christmas Eve, the spirits of a group of CAROLERS have come together to retell their favorite ghost story of all. All locations of this story are represented by found objects in the warehouse, and are recreated by the CAROLERS themselves.*

AT RISE: *Christmas Eve, 1836. The streets of London, nightfall. The stage is dark. The streetlamp starts to glow. CAROLER #5 appears upstage center, at the edge of the glow, crossing down into the light, singing "Coventry Carol" as she does so. She is leading a funeral procession.*

CAROLER #5

*Lullay, Thou little tiny Child
By, by, lully, lullay
Lullay, Thou little tiny Child
By, by, lully, lullay*

(The other CAROLERS appear behind her. Four of them carry a rectangular crate between them on their shoulders, as if it were a coffin. They join in on the next verse as they cross stage right.)

CAROLERS

*O sisters too, how may we do
For to preserve this day?
This poor youngling for whom we sing
By, by, lully, lullay*

(They freeze and hold out the last note until it becomes a hum under, as CAROLER #2 steps out from the group. He observes the funeral party a moment, then turns to the audience.)

CAROLER #2

Old Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story we are going to relate.

(The streetlamp goes out and the lights change as we flash forward seven years to Christmas Eve day, 1843. The CAROLERS unfreeze and begin to sing "Sussex Carol." As they sing, they change the scene to the office of Scrooge and Marley. The coffin "box" gets turned on its end to become Scrooge's desk. A tall stool is placed behind it. A smaller box and shorter stool are brought on for Cratchit's desk. A lit candle is placed on it.)

CAROLERS

*On Christmas night all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring
On Christmas night all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring
News of great joy, news of great mirth
News of our merciful King's birth*

(CAROLER #1 becomes EBENEZER SCROOGE. CAROLER #3 becomes BOB CRATCHIT. SCROOGE takes his seat. BOB takes his.)

*All out of darkness we have light
That made the angels sing this night...*

(The CAROLERS hum the next line of the verse as they melt into the shadows.)

BOB

Seven years ago tonight.

SCROOGE

What's that?

BOB

Mr. Marley died seven years ago this very night.

SCROOGE

Marley?

BOB

Jacob Marley, your business partner. I was remembering that he died seven years ago tonight, on Christmas Eve.

SCROOGE

I see. And am I paying you for your memories, Mr. Cratchit?

BOB

No, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Then I suggest you get back to work and “remember” on your own time.

BOB

Yes, Mr. Scrooge. I’ll just put some more coal on the fire...

SCROOGE

Coal is expensive. If you are cold, you have a candle with which to warm yourself.

BOB

Yes, sir.

*(BOB crosses to his desk and sits. The CAROLERS begin to sing
“Good King Wenceslas.” NOTE: To be sung up tempo and joyfully.)*

CAROLERS (O.S.)

*Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even*

(FRED enters SCROOGE’s office.)

FRED/CAROLERS

*Brightly shown the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel...*

SCROOGE

What’s this? What’s this?!

FRED/CAROLERS

*When a poor man came in sight
Gathering winter fuel*

FRED

A merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug! What right have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.

FRED

What right have you to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE

Humbug. What's Christmas but 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 would be boiled in his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.

FRED

Uncle Scrooge!

SCROOGE

Nephew! You 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 daresay, Christmas being one of them. But I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come around, as a kind, forgiving, charitable time. A time when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely. And therefore, Uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold in my pocket, I believe that Christmas has done me good and will do me good, and I say God bless it!

(BOB applauds.)

SCROOGE

Let me hear another 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 in hell, first.

FRED

But why? 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 can't we be friends?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

FRED

I'm sorry to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel to which I have been a party. But I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So, a Merry Christmas, Uncle!

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

And a Happy New Year!

(FRED crosses to BOB. CAROLERS hum the next four lines of "Good King Wenceslas" under the following dialogue.)

CAROLERS (O.S)

(Humming)

Hither, Page, and stand by me

If thy know'st its telling...

Yonder poor man who is he...?

Where and what his dwelling...?

FRED

Merry Christmas to you, Bob Cratchit.

BOB

Thank you, Mr. Fred. And a Merry Christmas to you.

FRED

How's that fine family of yours?

BOB

Very well, sir – thank you.

FRED

Give them my regards.

BOB

I will, sir – thank you.

(FRED tips his hat, joining the CAROLERS in singing the remainder of the verse.)

FRED/CAROLERS (O.S.)

*Sire, he lives a good league hence
Underneath the mountain
Up against the forest fence
By St. Agnes Fountain*

*(FRED exits past SOLICITOR #1 and SOLICITOR #2.
SOLICITORS enter the office as CAROLERS start the next verse.
SCROOGE doesn't look up.)*

*Bring me flesh and bring me wine
Bring me pine logs hither...*

(CAROLERS hum the remainder of the verse under the following dialogue.)

SOLICITOR #2

(Clearing his throat)

Ahem.

SCROOGE

What's this?

SOLICITOR #1

(Consulting a list)
Scrooge and Marley's, I believe.

SOLICITOR #1

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.

SOLICITOR #2

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

SCROOGE

State your business. I have work...

SOLICITOR #1

At this festive season of the year, it is desirable that we should make some slight provision for the Poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at this time.

SCROOGE

Are there no prisons?

SOLICITOR #2

Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE

And the workhouses? Are they still in operation?

SOLICITOR #2

They are.

SCROOGE

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

(SOLICITOR #1 and SOLICITOR #2 exchange a worried look.)

SOLICITOR #1

Mr. Scrooge, a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE

Nothing.

SOLICITOR #2

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've mentioned – they cost enough, and those who are badly off must go there.

SOLICITOR #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. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

CAROLERS (O.S.)

*In the master's steps he trod
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod
Which the saint had printed
Therefore Christian men be sure
Wealth or rank possessing
Ye who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing*

(As the CAROLERS sing, SCROOGE goes back to his ledger. The SOLICITORS exit. At the end of the song, the CAROLERS begin to toll the hour of five o'clock.)

Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong!

SCROOGE

Five o'clock.

*(SCROOGE and BOB close their ledgers and step off their stools.
BOB snuffs out his candle and hands SCROOGE his hat.)*

SCROOGE

You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

BOB

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

BOB

Christmas comes but once a year, sir.

SCROOGE

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

(Beat.)

Be here all the earlier the next morning.

BOB

Yes, sir. Merry Christmas, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug.

(SCROOGE exits and walks the streets of London. The streetlamp glows in the growing dark. CAROLERS enter.)

CAROLERS

*God rest ye, merry gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay
Remember Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas Day*

SCROOGE

(To CAROLERS)

Clear the road! Out of my way!

(Silence as CAROLERS scatter out of his way. SCROOGE walks past. BOB rushes to join CAROLERS and they continue singing as they shift the scene Scrooge's bedroom.)

BOB/CAROLERS

*To save us all from Satan's power
When we had gone astray
O tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy*

(The CAROLERS exit. SCROOGE walks past the streetlamp, now the only source of light.)

CAROLERS (O.S.)

(Haunting, drawn out)

Scrooooooge.

(SCROOGE stops and looks around.)

SCROOGE

Who is it? Who's there?

CAROLERS (O.S.)

SCROOOOOGE...

(BEGGAR WOMAN, holding a baby, appears out of the darkness behind SCROOGE and touches his shoulder, startling him.)

SCROOGE

Aahh!

BEGGAR WOMAN

Begging your pardon, sir. Could you spare a farthing for a poor woman trying to feed her child?

SCROOGE

No I cannot! And there's no begging in front of my house. Be gone! Away from my door!

(The BEGGAR WOMAN disappears into the shadows. SCROOGE enters his house/bedroom. The streetlamp goes out. SCROOGE removes his hat and coat. Offstage, CAROLER #5 start humming "The Coventry Carol." SCROOGE looks about, startled.)

What is that?

(Offstage, the other CAROLERS groan like spirits in anguish. SCROOGE grabs a candle and looks about.)

Who's there?

(More groans. Humming continues.)

Show yourself!

(The sound of approaching footsteps and a chain dragging the floor.)