

EXT. LONDON. SAINT PAUL'S CATHEDRAL. MORNING.

Perched on the spire of St. Paul's Cathedral is a SPIRIT. It looks down at the square below, a merry place in 1850's London on Christmas Eve.

INSERT. PLACARD.

The Spirit holds an ephemeral chalkboard on which writing appears: "Marley Is Dead".

EXT. SAINT PAUL'S SPIRE. MORNING.

Looking sad about the whole business, the Spirit points down at one PERSON in the square below who stands out among the other MERRYMAKERS.

CLOSER.

That Person, a man who carries his own low temperature about with him, is Ebenezer Scrooge. He pushes past smoking bishop drink carts and people crowded around bonfires. If he could just get through this throng of idiots and get down to business . . .

EXT. SAINT PAUL'S SQUARE. THE FIRM. MORNING.

Tucked off the square is an eminent warehouse with a fancy facade. Lettered over the door: "The Firm of Scrooge & Marley".

Scrooge finally breaks free of the Merrymakers, only to pull up short. TWO GENTLEMEN (one, a rotund MOLE-like man with spectacles, the other a moustached RATTY) peer into his front window.

Bundled up and hurrying with downcast eyes, BOB CRATCHIT runs right into Mole.

CRATCHIT
I beg your pardon.

Cratchit continues around them and moves to unlock the Firm's door. Mole and Ratty, seeing Cratchit's key, assume he is an owner.

MOLE
Have I the pleasure of addressing
Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

CRATCHIT

(pulling his forelock)
Robert Cratchit, gentlemen. Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years.

MOLE

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

Cratchit stares at them a beat.

CRATCHIT

You must be new to this part of London.

Mole and Ratty blink back at him.

MOLE

We'll wait then for Mr. Scrooge.

CRATCHIT

As you like.

Cratchit enters without inviting them in. Surprised, they turn from the door and scan the square.

ANGLE ON SCROOGE.

He's been watching the exchange with Cratchit. As Mole and Ratty finish, Scrooge jumps and ducks out of sight. In his haste, he backs into a scene being dramatized by a theatrical troupe whose stage is on the square.

ANGLE ON THE STAGE.

The troupe plays "Hamlet", Act 1, Scene V.

GHOST

Mark me.

HAMLET

I will.

GHOST

My hour is almost come, when I to sulphurous and tormenting flames must render up myself.

HAMLET

Alas, poor ghost!

ANGLE ON SCROOGE.

He stands next to HAMLET, joining in his amazement at the GHOST.

The Audience breaks into laughter, pointing at Scrooge. Ghost, in character, gives Scrooge an ominous stare.

Embarrassed, Scrooge departs the scene and makes the one move he'd been avoiding: he walks right into Mole and Ratty.

MOLE

Mr. Scrooge, I hope?

Scrooge concentrates on putting his key into the lock.

MOLE (CONT'D)

We only ask for a moment of your time.

SCROOGE

Make an appointment with my clerk. Something next month, perhaps.

MOLE

But, sir, we specifically refer to this festive season when the suffering of the poor is keenly felt.

SCROOGE

I don't make merry at Christmas.

MOLE

Certainly you can appreciate that some meat and drink for the poor would bring such cheer to mind and body.

Mole is not accustomed to being refused.

MOLE (CONT'D)

What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE

Nothing.

MOLE

You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE

I wish to be left alone!

Stunned, Mole backs away. Scrooge returns to his keyhole, but Ratty grabs him by the collar and turns him toward the square.

RATTY

Look!

ANGLE ON THE SQUARE.

Merrymaking is in full swing.

ANGLE ON SCROOGE.

RATTY

Abundance rejoices, old chap! Make some slight provision for the poor and destitute. Think of the common necessities, sir! Think of the common comforts!

Ratty, a look of appeal on his face, waits for Scrooge to agree.

SCROOGE

Is not the Poor Law in full vigour, then? And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?

Shock and devastation. Ratty can't even reply to such a heartless statement.

MOLE

Workhouses separate families and are designed to stigmatize and horrify the poor. As Christians we cannot support such treatment.

SCROOGE

I support such treatment with every government tax taken from my pocketbook. Those who are badly off must go to the workhouses.

MOLE

Many would rather die.

SCROOGE

Better to decrease the surplus population, then. A hardworking businessman like myself should not starve because the poor and their babies have eaten all the food.

RATTY
How dare you, sir!

Ratty's vehement outburst startles Scrooge, who backs up.

RATTY (CONT'D)
We speak of Christian souls and you
speak of wheat futures on the Stock
Exchange!

SCROOGE
Without the Poor Law men wouldn't
work for a living. They'd lay about
and enjoy my pennies.

RATTY
How did you come to think so ill of
your fellow man? I pray that you
never know human frailty, Mr.
Scrooge.

SCROOGE
If I do, I will have the means to
hire my own help and not need the
beggary of Outdoor Relief to meet
my wants.

As Ratty and Scrooge have argued, they've moved closer to the
theatrical stage. Now, Ghost, who is to speak from offstage,
stands near them and acts his scene.

GHOST
Swear!

ANGLE ON THE STAGE.

HAMLET
Well said, old mole! canst work i'
the earth so fast? A worthy pioner!
Once more remove, good friends.

HORATIO
O day and night, but this is
wondrous strange!

HAMLET
And therefore as a stranger give it
welcome. There are more things in
heaven and earth, Horatio, than are
dreamt of in your philosophy.

ANGLE ON SCROOGE.

MOLE

I see that we have taken up your
valuable time for naught. Good day
to you, Mr. Scrooge.

Mole moves to leave, then reaches for Ratty, who is still in shock, to lead him away.

Scrooge, disgusted, approaches the Firm's doorway. Blocking his way is the Spirit, still holding his chalkboard. Scrooge walks right through him without noticing.

And then, as Scrooge unlocks the door, he steps back and looks up at the Firm's sign over the door. When he looks back at the front window an eerie tableau appears:

A seven-years Younger Scrooge, his back to the window, sits at the desk and writes in his account books. Beyond, in the dim, Marley lies in state.

Take a beat to realize that the Younger Scrooge is counting his money with a dead partner only feet away. Younger Scrooge straightens and whips a glance over his shoulder at the window.

Current Scrooge startles and steps away. As the tableau fades, he enters his building.

INT. THE FIRM. DAY.

Immediately to one side of the front door is Scrooge's office. Most of the Firm is an overstuffed warehouse. At the far end of the space is an elevated cubbyhole called the Tank -- Cratchit's office.

Scrooge, entering the building, yells toward the Tank.

SCROOGE

I saw you, Cratchit. What do you
mean arriving at that time of day?

Not expecting an answer, Scrooge goes into his office.

INT. THE TANK. DAY.

His Tank a kind of clerk's tree house, Cratchit looks out across the warehouse and sees Scrooge enter his office.

Cratchit pivots from the window to his little stove that holds one lonely piece of coal. Humming a Christmas carol, Cratchit coaxes the coal to light.

As Cratchit blows on it, the Spirit, unnoticed, joins him and blows, too.

The bell over Cratchit's desk RINGS.

INT. SCROOGE'S OFFICE. DAY.

Scrooge yanks on the bell pull.

FOLLOW THE ROPE.

From the pull tassel the bell rope runs up to the ceiling and through a hole into the warehouse.

Across the warehouse rafters, rats scurry along the rope as it runs from Scrooge's Office to the Tank.

Inside the Tank, the rope ends at an ugly, jangly bell.

INT. THE TANK. DAY.

The coal nib, which has begun to catch, dies out at the RING of the bell.

Cratchit doubles the muffler round his neck, grabs a coal shovel propped by his door, and heads into the warehouse.

Watching, the Spirit holds up his ethereal chalkboard. Writing appears: "Scrooge Is Cold".

INT. WAREHOUSE. DAY.

Cratchit, wielding his coal shovel as a weapon, wends his way through a maze of sky-high boxes and stacked goods. Rats race along beside him as if they were vehicles driving a grid of city streets.

The CLANG of the continuously ringing bell echoes through the warehouse.

INT. SCROOGE'S OFFICE. DAY.

When Cratchit enters, Scrooge lets go of the bell tassel.

SCROOGE
Took you long enough. Were you
napping on my time?

CRATCHIT
No, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE
Have Grimby and Sons paid their
bill yet?

CRATCHIT
No, sir.

SCROOGE
Why not?

CRATCHIT
Christmas Eve, sir.

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

CRATCHIT
Speaking of which, sir --

Scrooge RINGS his bell vigorously, cutting off Cratchit. This kind of interruption is well known to Cratchit.

CRATCHIT (CONT'D)
(defeated)
Was there anything else, sir?

SCROOGE
No.

Cratchit, leaving, uses his coal shovel to take a briquet from the scuttle in the corner.

Again, the relentless BELL. Cratchit retreats.

Before he can leave, though, Scrooge nabs the shovel out of his hands.

INT. WAREHOUSE. DAY.

Cratchit, leaving Scrooge's Office, almost steps on a frozen rat dead on the door sill. Hopping and dashing, he makes his way back to the Tank.

INT. THE TANK. DAY.

Cratchit jumps into the Tank, shivering. Stuffed under his desk is a quilt, but when he reaches for it he notices a family of rats snuggled in it.

Whatever heat Cratchit's candle gives off will have to do.

Suddenly the candle FLARES up.

DISTANT VOICE

(V. O.)

God save you, uncle!

Looking up, Cratchit's face flares, too.

INT. SCROOGE'S OFFICE. DAY.

Standing in the office doorway, as cheerful as a bonfire, is Scrooge's nephew, FRED (the Distant Voice).

FRED

And a Merry Christmas!

Scrooge startles and retreats from Fred's glow.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug.

FRED

Christmas a humbug, uncle! Don't be cross.

SCROOGE

What else can I be when I live in such a world as this? Every idiot who goes around with Merry Christmas on his lips should be boiled in his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.

Fred lifts an eyebrow at him.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)

He should!

Fred, warmth emanating from him, opens his coat. The edge of Scrooge's desk starts to thaw and drip.

SCROOGE (CONT'D)
(pulling at his collar)
Keep Christmas in your own way and
let me keep it in mine.

FRED
But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE
Let me leave it alone then!

Scrooge backs up against the wall and PULLS the bell tassel.

FOLLOW THE ROPE.

Rats along the rafters gnaw at the rope.

INT. THE TANK. DAY.

As the BELL rings, Cratchit rises.

The JANGLE of Scrooge's bell is suddenly overwhelmed by the CHIMING of the bells from St. Paul's Cathedral. Cratchit, renewed in his purpose, heads for Scrooge's Office.

INT. SCROOGE'S OFFICE. DAY.

SCROOGE
What good has Christmas ever done
you?

FRED
From many things I've derived good
without putting a scrap of gold or
silver in my pocket.

Cratchit enters, basking in Fred's good cheer.

FRED (CONT'D)
Christmas is the only time of year
when men and women open their shut-
up hearts freely and think of
people below them as if they really
were fellow-passengers to the
grave.

Fred steps closer to Scrooge, who is pressed against the wall.

FRED (CONT'D)
 I believe Christmas *has* done me
 good, it *will* do me good, and I
 say, God bless it!

Cratchit applauds. Fred smiles at him, encouraging.

CRATCHIT
 Mr. Scrooge, I intend to take
 Christmas day off!

FRED
 Don't be angry, uncle. Come dine
 with us tomorrow.

Scrooge tries to ring the bell, but the rope breaks in his
 hand.

SCROOGE
 (nonplussed)
 Good afternoon!

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

SCROOGE
 (sidling away)
 Good afternoon!

FRED
 I am sorry, with all my heart, to
 find you so resolute.

Scrooge gropes behind his back.

FRED (CONT'D)
 So, a Merry Christmas, uncle!

Scrooge finds the cupboard door handle.

FRED (CONT'D)
 And a Happy New Year!

Scrooge climbs into the cupboard and closes himself in.

Fred tips his hat to Cratchit and exits. Cratchit sits,
 exhausted by recent events.

After a moment of quiet, Scrooge pokes his head around the
 door.

SCROOGE
Is he gone?

CRATCHIT
Yes, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE
You'll want all day tomorrow, I
suppose?

CRATCHIT
If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE
It's not convenient!

Master and clerk are back to themselves.

CRATCHIT
It's only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE
Be here all the earlier next
morning.

Nodding, Cratchit tucks his muffler tight and dashes out of
the office.

ANGLE OUT THE WINDOW. DAY.

Cratchit, free at last, joins in the merrymaking on the
square by sliding down a little ice hill behind a line of
boys.