

about with him. He iced his office in the dog days, and he didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

(He is now SCROOGE. Everyone has left the stage but SCROOGE and BOB CRATCHIT, who is busily writing at his desk on the turret, and trying not to be affected by the cold. A pause. FREDERICK, as SCROOGE's nephew, FRED, bursts into the room.)

FRED. *(Tossing a small gift – a piece of fruit, a candy cane, perhaps – to CRATCHIT.)* A merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE. Bah. Humbug.

FRED. Christmas a humbug, Uncle? You don't mean that, I'm sure.

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

FRED. Come then, what reason have you to be dismal? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE. What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money? A time for finding yourself a year older but not an hour richer? A time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em weighed dead against you. 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! If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled in his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!

FRED. Uncle!

SCROOGE. Nephew! 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 have derived good by which I have not profited, I dare say – Christmas among them. It's the only time I know of when men and women open their shut-up hearts and think of less fortunate people as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures. And 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!

(As he puts the one lonely lump of coal on the fire, CRATCHIT bursts into applause at his speech.)

SCROOGE. *(To CRATCHIT.)* Let me 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 dine with the devil first.

FRED. But why, Uncle?

SCROOGE. Why did you get married?

FRED. Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE. *(As if this was the only thing in the world more ridiculous than "Merry Christmas.")* "Because I fell in love." 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. 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 humor to the last. So, a merry Christmas, Uncle!

(From his coat, he pulls a small wrapped package, and sets it down on SCROOGE's desk. Then, he turns for the door.)