

MERCEDES enters, at her customary pace, as **BOB CRATCHIT**.

CRATCHIT All right, hold your horses.

SCROOGE Why are you late?

CRATCHIT Didn't hear the cue.

SCROOGE You may be quick-witted, Cratchit, but you must learn that time is money. I shall dock fourpence from your wages this week.

CRATCHIT Sorry I'm late, Mr Scrooge.

SCROOGE There's no point in running to your desk now. The damage is done. Put some coal on the fire. But only one lump, mind. Just because it's Christmas, there's no need to be extravagant.

CRATCHIT All right. Don't rush me.

SCROOGE Don't stand there warming your hands, man! Go and make my tea.

CRATCHIT Flipping heck.

SCROOGE When I was your age we didn't have fires to warm ourselves by. And we didn't have flower-arranging classes either. We just had to throw the blooms into the vase higgledy-piggledy, but we were glad of the opportunity to experiment. You young people today, with your magic lanterns and your curling tongs, you have it far too easy.

CRATCHIT reaches the stove, takes a large piece of coal out of his pocket, but cannot bend down to open the door and throw it inside. He taps on the stove. The door is opened from the inside and **MRS REECE's** banged arm reaches out. **CRATCHIT** puts the coal in her hand, but it is too large for her to take through the stove door, and so she returns it to him and he gives her a smaller piece, which is the right size.

CRATCHIT Thank you.

MRS REECE You're welcome.

She closes the stove door.

SCROOGE And you didn't warm the pot before you made this tea.

CRATCHIT It's coming, it's coming.

CRATCHIT exits.

A bell is heard, off.

FELICITY enters as **SCROOGE's** nephew **FRED**.

FRED Good morning, uncle. And a merry Christmas to you.

SCROOGE Humbug!

FRED Humbuggle, uncle...lumbuggle...lunc? You don't mean that, I am sure?

SCROOGE I do. 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. One lump or two?

FRED One, if you please.

SCROOGE Still watching your figure, eh, nephew?

FRED Yes, unlike you, uncle, I am not blessed with a firm and well-proportioned body.

SCROOGE (prompting) And perfect skin.

FRED And perfect skin. What charming, hand-painted crockery.

SCROOGE Yes, Cratchit fires it in his lunch hour. He's a little treasure really. Cratchit!

CRATCHIT enters with a tray of tea.

CRATCHIT Yes, I haven't forgotten. I had a bit of a spasm in the dressing-room. I'll be all right. One sugar with no tea, Mr Scrooge?

SCROOGE Take it away and do the washing-up, Cratchit.

CRATCHIT You what?

He pours the tea – an immensely noisy and messy business – regardless of the ensuing dialogue.

FRED That welcome refreshment reminds me of the reason for my visit, Uncle. Will you dine with us tomorrow?

SCROOGE Dine with you?

FRED Well, it will be nothing fancy. The au pair has gone back to Oslo for the holidays. Shall we say one o'clock for cocktails?

SCROOGE Say what you like. But your idle merriments will be conducted in my absence. I hate Christmas and all celebrations of the confounded season. If I had my way, people who invite other people to Christmas dinner would be strung up to the ceiling with their own paper chains.

FRED Well, you don't have to make your mind up now. Just drop in if you are passing. It is Liberty Hall round at our place.

SCROOGE Bah!

FRED And bring a bottle.

SCROOGE Good morning, nephew!

FRED *exits.*

CRATCHIT (*offering tea*) Would your nephew like a cup?

SCROOGE Cratchit, take a letter.

CRATCHIT We've done the tea, have we?

CRATCHIT *exits with the tray of tea.*

SCROOGE To Messrs Goodbody and Wimble: "Gentlemen, unless our account is settled within the next seven days, I shall be forced to put the matter into the hands of my solicitors. Yours, etc., etc." Read that back to me, will you, Cratchit?

CRATCHIT (*offstage*) Can't find the pen.

SCROOGE And see who that is at the door.

The sound of a bell being rung and then dropped.

MRS REECE *enters as a GENTLEMAN with a tray of flags and a collecting tin.*

GENTLEMAN Joyce! Be careful with that bell. It's my budgie's.

SCROOGE State your business and be quick about it.

GENTLEMAN I am a poor crippled boy.

SCROOGE What?

GENTLEMAN Oh, no. That's when I'm Tiny Tim. Em...have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge or Mr Marley?

SCROOGE Mr Scrooge died seven years ago, this very night. I am Mr Marley... Scrooge, I mean. It's Marley who's dead... of course.

GENTLEMAN Yes, easy mistake to make. Can I trespass upon your generosity?

SCROOGE Don't shake that tin at me.

The GENTLEMAN shakes the empty tin, then shakes it next to his ear.

GENTLEMAN (*into the wings*) Who took the pesetas out of the tin?

SCROOGE Forget the pesetas!

GENTLEMAN It's all very well to say "Forget the pesetas", Thelma, but when I go to Marbella, I want a bit of loose change if you don't mind. (*Into the wings*) All right, turn out your pockets.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

SCROOGE Cratchit! I want that letter read back to me. Right this minute. Do you understand?